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Special Education Teacher Retention in Small Schools

Siri Marie Olson

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, Special Education Teacher Retention in Small Schools, by Siri Olson, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisory committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University. The dissertation advisory committee and the student's department chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION IN SMALL SCHOOLS

by

SIRI OLSON

Under the Direction of DaShaunda Patterson, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Special education teacher attrition is a widespread problem in the United States (Billingsley 2005; Boe, 2006; Duffy & Forgan, 2005). Although researchers have explored factors that increase special education teacher retention, such as increased involvement from administrators, more time for collaboration with general education teachers, and limits on caseloads to maintain appropriate work loads, the perspective of experienced special education teachers in small primary schools (schools with fewer than 500 students serving pre-kindergarten through third grade) has received little attention. Small schools have many advantages, but special educators in small schools face some particular issues, including the fact that they typically have few special education colleagues, must often work with students and teachers in multiple grade levels, and must accommodate caseloads increasing in size throughout the year as many students become eligible for services in the early grades. To gain the perspective of special education teachers regarding the factors contributing to their decisions to stay in small schools, I have designed a multiple-case study in the context of a small school district. This inquiry is intended to fill the

gap in the retention literature by surveying and interviewing special educators working in small schools. The primary research question is: From the perspective of experienced special education teachers serving pre-kindergarten (PK) and kindergarten through third grade (K-3) students in small schools, what kinds of organizational and individual characteristics influence their decision to continue teaching special education in a small school?
INDEX WORDS: Special education, Small schools, Attrition, Retention

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION IN SMALL SCHOOLS

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SIRI OLSON

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GLOSSARY

Arena Assessment: A transdisciplinary model to assessment activities where a facilitator conducts the assessment activities across all areas while other team members observe (Wolery & Dyk, 1984)

Babies Can't Wait: A program to assist families in providing early intervention therapy for their pre-school child. The program has 45 days to evaluate the child, then another 45 days to develop a plan and provide services for the child.

Case Manager: Special education teacher responsible for a group of students

Child Find: A legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to special education services. Child Find covers every child from birth through age 21. The school must evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability (Lee, 2014-2017).

Courtesy Tuition: In the past, when the small district schools had been under enrolled, the district allowed out-of-area students to enroll for a fee (tuition). The term was still used in the district for children of staff members who were allowed to attend for free, as a benefit, hence "courtesy tuition."

Duty-Free Lunch: Teacher's time for lunch without responsibility for students.

Eligibility: Students are determined eligible through the Response to Intervention process followed by an evaluation. To be determined eligible, the student must have a disability or disabilities and the student's disability/disabilities must adversely affect educational performance.

Emic: Research where the researcher is a participant in the culture being studied.

Etic: Research where the researcher is not involved with the culture being studied.

Expeditionary Learning: An education philosophy and curriculum following principles of Outward Bound, USA and practices of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Together, they map out the values and methods that define Expeditionary Learning (EL) schools. Each grade level conducts a cross-curricular expedition that lasts several months, culminating in a *Celebration of Learning.*

Experienced Teacher: For this study, any teacher with five or more years of experience in the district

Extrinsic: External rewards and organizational influences.

Inclusion Model: Special education students served in the general education environment with support.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The IEP is a document created by a team of teachers and parents for every child receiving special education services. The IEP outlines the child's learning needs, goals, and the services that will be provided

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The law created in 1990 as a modification of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). This law ensures that special needs students receive appropriate free public education in the least restrictive environment necessary to meet those students' needs.

Intrinsic: Internal motivation and personal values.

Local Education Agency: The school district representative who makes sure the district provides the services required by the IEP.

Response to Intervention (RTI): A multi-tiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. RTI can include evaluation for eligibility for special education (with parent consent).

Self-Contained Model: Students age six and older with more severe needs receive 60% or more of their instruction in a separate class with one teacher and one or more assistants.

Small School: For this study, and school with fewer than 500 students.

Supply Teacher: A teacher hired by a district to substitute as needed when a regular teacher is absent

1 THE PROBLEM

"There's your classroom, here's your book, good luck" (Johnson & Kardos, 2002, p. 13). That statement pretty much sums up the orientation I received for my first teaching job, and the lack of collegial and administrative assistance or collaboration I received throughout the year led me to leave the profession for several years. Apparently, I was not the only one reaching this decision early in a teaching career. In the United States, according to research, approximately 50% of new teachers leave the profession (attrition) or transfer to another position in education (mobility) within the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Jonson, 2002; Kaff, 2004; Whitaker).

But I did return, and have since worked in special education for nine years. My first job upon returning was at a suburban school with over 800 students. I was hired as an inclusion teacher, one of a team of four, responsible for co-teaching with general education teachers and teaching small groups in the general education classroom or individuals in a resource room. The first year was very stressful; I felt overwhelmed with the schedule, lesson plans, and paperwork. Although I was not officially assigned a mentor, a veteran colleague with more than ten years of experience took on the role, and took the time to provide instructional tips and feedback, share materials, help problem-solve students' academic and behavioral difficulties, and offer a friendly listening ear when I was stressed.

Our department also shared a special education lead teacher with several other schools. Once a week she was at our school, but we did not often see her. She held monthly meetings, which were mostly to give us district information and update us on new rules and regulations. At

the end of each term she reviewed our files and left a checklist of what was missing from each, which we had to correct within a week. The principal was not directly involved in our work, and relied on the lead teacher to handle any issues or concerns we had.

Years later, I transferred to a special education teaching job in a primary (kindergarten through third grade) school with only 255 students. It was my first time working in such a small school. My experience there, working in the same type of special education inclusion model as I had in the larger county school previously, was vastly different. Both schools were high performing and in privileged neighborhoods. I had approximately the same number of students with special needs on my caseload. It made me wonder, what is different about special education in small schools? What kinds of issues do special educators have in small schools that they do not have in large schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages for special educators in schools of different sizes?

In my new job, I was the only inclusion teacher in the school, responsible for the students with special needs in all grades. I was expected to collaborate and plan with my four different general education colleagues, which was not feasible, given that I had to work in another grade level whenever the general education teachers had planning time. I had a tiny office where no more than three students could meet with me at once, and very few materials, since the materials from my former school were all school property so I could not take them with me. As new students qualified for services, I had to revise my schedule and meet the requirements of their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) as required by law, stipulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

However, my principal and the instructional coach were very supportive. The principal came to every IEP meeting, and knew my students well. She made sure materials were procured

and helped me solve scheduling problems whenever possible. She assisted with issues with parents, and provided a safe space for upset students in her office, where she would talk and read to them to help calm them down. She advocated with the central administration to hire another special education teacher the following year to ease the burden and to make sure our students got the services they deserved, and so the teachers had time to collaborate with general education teachers to plan instruction to meet student needs.

Many of the things I experienced in previous larger school appear in the literature review in chapter two. On the positive side, in the larger school, I had a caseload of ten students all in the same inclusion classroom, so I had only one general education co-teacher to plan with. On the negative side, I experienced stress, no time for paperwork or collaboration, no mentor unless a co-worker volunteered to help, lack of administrative support, and no support from the central office, all consistent with previous research. In the small school, despite a caseload of the same size, I had one colleague in special education serving a self-contained class, had to plan with four different general education teachers, and had no time in my schedule for planning. However, I had very good support from my principal and a fair amount of support from the central office.

Statement of the Problem

From my own experience, I was not surprised that studies show that there is a more severe shortage and higher turnover rate of special education teachers than in general education (Billingsley 2005; Boe, 2006; Duffy & Forgan, 2005), and many more special education teachers transfer to general education than the reverse (Billingsley 2005; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, & Barkanic, 1998). To this day, students with special needs bear the brunt of the shortage (Billingsley, 2005; Bull, Oliver, Callaghan, & Woodcock, 2015; Chung, Edgar-Smith, Palmer, Chung, DeLambo, & Huang, 2015; Hume, Sreckovic, Snyder, & Carnahan, 2014). According to Tyler and Brunner

(2014), nearly one million children with special needs in the United States either receive services from inadequately trained educators, or do not receive mandated services at all due to special education teacher shortages.

In my experience, special educators working in small primary schools have different issues than teachers in middle-sized or large schools. First, schools serving children from four to nine years old face different challenges, because many more students are identified as needing special education services in pre-kindergarten to third grade than in the later grades (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Special education teachers in primary grades must therefore be able to accommodate new students requiring services more frequently than teachers serving students in later grades, by creating new IEPs, adjusting schedules, and working with more co-teachers at any time during the school year. This process creates an additional stress that is not nearly as common for teachers in the later grades, where student caseloads remain relatively stable.

Second, depending on the number of students with special needs, teachers working in small schools may have few or no peers in their department. Therefore, each special educator at a small school may have to cover multiple grade levels, resulting in little time to plan or collaborate with co-teachers (Lemke, 2010). The type of collegial support available to general education teachers (grade level collaboration, mentoring, shared planning) may not be available due to the small number of teachers and demanding schedules of special educators in small schools.

However, some small school advocates maintain that the ideal size for a public school is no more that 300-400 students and claim that schools serving more than 400 students cannot be effective (Bingler et al., 2002; Lee & Loeb, 2000). In a study of special education in New York City public schools, Jessen (2012) defined small schools as those “enrolling fewer than 600 stu-

dents" (p. 463), but added that some schools over 600 but which were "known to have been developed as part of the small school reforms" (p. 463) could also be labeled small. Because small schools have been defined as having anywhere from 300 to 600 students, for the purpose of this study I will use the number 500.

The Small School Coalition attested to the benefits of small schools, including greater collaboration with stakeholders, higher student achievement, and higher rates of teacher satisfaction. Researchers have also indicated that, in general, small schools have many advantages. Small schools purportedly enhance achievement for students and offer teachers better working conditions (Barker, 1986; Heath, 2006; Howley, 2000). These benefits may improve teacher retention in small schools, as opposed to large schools, where there may possibly be greater attrition or mobility.

Key Terms

The focus of this study is on special education teacher retention. I will use the term *retention* as it is commonly defined in the field, referring to teachers who stay in the teaching profession in their current positions (Billingsley, 1993; Bozonelos, 2008; Prather-Jones, 2011; Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009). In order to examine retention issues, it is important to define and understand the term *attrition* as well.

Many researchers use the term *attrition* to refer to teachers who leave their position for another position in education, to transfer to another school, or to leave the field of education altogether (Billingsley, 2004a, 2005; Morvant, Gersten, Gillman, Keating, & Blake, 1995; Plecki, Elfers, Loeb, Zahir, & Knapp, 2005). Other researchers define *attrition* as only the teachers who leave the field entirely (Boe, Cook, and Sunderland, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Swars et al., 2009), and use either the term *mobility* or *migration* for the teachers who change their position

within education or move to another school (Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Swars et al., 2009). The term *mobility* refers to teachers who may choose to leave positions because they feel overwhelmed, unsatisfied, unappreciated, so they find a more appealing option within education, or for any other personal or life experiential reasons. Whether the cause is stress, lack of collegial or administrative support, behavior issues, lack of training or professional development, or even personal factors, special education teachers often seek other positions, either in special education at another school, in general education, or in educational administrative positions (Billingsley, 2005; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Miller, Brownell & Smith, 1999). While some teachers choose to leave the school but stay in the field, mobility decisions increase teacher shortages, especially at hard-to-staff or inner-city schools (Berry, 2004; Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Ironically, because the shortage of special education teachers is so severe, it is easy for teachers to find positions in special education at other schools (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Hughes, 2012). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to attrition as teachers who voluntarily leave their place of employment in the field of special education for any reason (Morvant et al., 1995). This definition allows me to explore teacher perspectives on both the organizational and individual factors that influence their decisions to remain in their schools and in the field of special education.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the apparent advantages of small schools, little research has been done to understand the issues that are at work in small school special education departments from the perspective of teachers working in them. The main purpose of this study was to describe the perspective of experienced special education teachers in small PK or K-3 schools and explain the organizational and individual factors that influence their decision to stay in their schools. In the process

of conducting the literature review and the study itself, I realized I also have an activist stance and a lens toward change. I want to have an impact on changing and improving the retention rates of special education teachers in small schools, and to influence policy to help all schools retain good special education teachers. I want to know if there are lessons to be learned from small schools that may influence retention, and believe that participants can make important recommendations for policy change. These issues will become a part of my implications for further research.

Research Questions

My research questions were:

1. What are the perspectives of experienced special education teachers working in small PK or K-3 schools about the organizational individual factors that affect their decision to continue teaching special education in a small school?
2. Which factors of employment are most important to special education teachers at all levels of experience in the small PK and K-3 schools to promote retention?
3. What are the principals' perceptions about which factors affect special education teacher retention in their small PK or K-3 school, and how do their views coincide with the teachers' perspectives?

Question 1 is specifically asking about *perspectives* – the way the teachers regard the organizational and individual factors from their point of view. In Question 3, I am interested in the principals' *perception*s - the way they think about or understand the teachers' motives and opinions.

Significance of the Study

These questions address an important need in the field of special education teacher retention. Researchers have proposed that keeping special education teachers in the field, rather than

recruiting new teachers, is one of the most important ways to decrease the shortage (Billingsley 2004b; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Teacher retention both saves money for school systems (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012) and for state and federal board of education budgets. Not including retirements, public school teacher turnover costs the state of Georgia alone approximately $185 million every year, and costs the United States about 4.9 billion every year (Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief, 2005). Perhaps most important, retention keeps the most experienced teachers in classrooms, which has a significant influence on student achievement (Billingsley, 2005; Chung, Edgar-Smith, Palmer, Chung, DeLambo, & Huang, 2015). Whereas most studies focus on factors affecting special education teacher retention at schools of any size (Billingsley, 2005; Berry, 2012; Bozonelos, 2008; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001), or for teachers working with students with specific disabilities (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Prather-Jones, 2011), there is little research on special education teacher retention specifically in small schools. This study will address that gap and add the perspective of special education teachers with at least five years of experience in small PK or K-3 schools to the body of literature seeking to find answers to the critical issue of special education teacher retention.

Assumptions and Theoretical Framework

My work is motivated by a worldview that entails the belief that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work . . . and develop subjective meaning of their experiences" (Crotty, 2013, p. 8). My theoretical framework is based in an epistemology of social constructionism, a term first introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1966), meaning that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs" (p. 1). Some authors use social construct*ionism* and social construct*ivism* in-

terchangeably, but there is a distinct difference. Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) has to do with learning, and assumes humans construct knowledge within the individual, but that the cognitive development to access knowledge is stimulated by human interaction. Constructionism, as opposed to constructivism, assumes that "social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction" (Young & Collin, 2004). In constructionism, knowledge is created (or constructed) by social interaction and is concerned with context, interpretation, and meaning (Crotty, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013).

Although social constructionism is often associated with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2012), my framework is most closely aligned with Gergen (1985), who maintained that social constructionist inquiry is "principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p. 266). My assumptions within this framework are: 1) that knowledge is constructed by human experience, and can only be obtained by qualitative involvement with participants, and 2) that researchers and respondents co-create the reality presented in the research.

In relation to my research questions and methodology, my constructionist philosophy is based on certain specific assumptions related to my field, including 1) the perspectives of teachers working in the field can be used to understand the factors relating to retention, 2) teachers' perspectives guide their behaviors and actions, 3) retaining experienced teachers is better for schools and for children with special needs than hiring new teachers, 4) working in special education in small schools is significantly different from working in special education in large schools, and 5) that students with special needs succeed academically and emotionally with consistent teaching from skilled teachers. The following review of the literature substantiates the significance of my topic and the missing piece that I am attempting to add to the field of teacher

retention. In chapter three, I will discuss the rationale and the two-phase multi-case study I developed using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Methods for Review/Search Criteria

My search for articles started from a wide focus (teacher support systems, teacher attrition rates) to a narrow focus (special education teacher support in small elementary schools). I used ERIC EBSCO, Proquest, and the Education Source (EBSCO) databases. I limited my article search to peer-reviewed journals but included works from any time period. Some examples of search terms I used included: *special education teacher support*, *special education teacher attrition/retention*, *support for teachers in small schools*, *small schools,* and *special education in small schools*. I read abstracts and the findings and conclusion sections of articles to determine if they might be relevant to my research. I used reference lists from articles to search for specific titles, and sometimes found more related titles while conducting that search. I also found some literature reviews by other authors (Billingsley 1993; Billingsley 2004; Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Heath, 2006; McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997) with implications for further research that helped me focus my dissertation questions on what was missing in the literature.

I organized my literature review into several sections. I began the review with a broad overview of teacher attrition and retention in the United States in general, an almost universally acknowledged and often debated problem with a myriad of suggested solutions. Although my primary question involved special education teacher retention, I first explored literature on general trends of both attrition and retention among all teachers, because it is not possible to increase retention without removing or ameliorating factors causing attrition and mobility. The next sec-

tion moved closer to my research questions and focused on the more specific issue of attrition of special education teachers, the reasons they leave the field, and the suggested solutions offered by researchers, as well as policy factors. In section three I reviewed research on special education retention and an explanation of how the literature related to my study and where the gap lay. In the fourth section, I brought in the key component of my research, by exploring research about small schools, and how the particular environment of small schools affected the retention of special education teachers. Finally, I explored the literature about experienced teacher perspectives on the factors that affected their decision to stay in the field of special education in a small school.

Attrition and Retention of Teachers in the United States

Researchers contended that teacher attrition and shortages were critical issues that urgently need to be addressed, especially in hard-to-staff or poor inner-city schools (Berry, 2004; Boe et al., 1997; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Swars et al., 2009). In the United States, approximately 50% of new teachers leave the profession or transfer to another position in education within the first five years (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Swars et al., 2009). Attrition leads to teacher shortages, especially in the fields of math, science, and special education (Billingsley, 2004a; Brownell, Sindelar, & Bishop, 2002; Swars et al., 2009). Teacher shortages are not only detrimental to students, but impact education in a number of other ways. Hiring and training new staff is expensive for school districts and uses funds that could be better spent elsewhere to improve schools (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). Teacher turnover affects staff morale, which in turn leads to greater turnover (Swars et al., 2009). Inexperienced and unqualified teachers are more likely to leave the field than their more experienced peers, which further exac-

erbates the problem (Morvant et al., 1995; Whitaker, 2003). Given that having a qualified teacher in the classroom is the best way to ensure students' opportunity to learn and increase their achievement (Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1998), finding solutions should be a national priority.

Attrition of Special Education Teachers

Keeping good teachers in special education may be even more difficult and, in my opinion, more critical. Students with special needs often have a harder time emotionally and academically dealing with changes in routine than their typical-learning peers (Bull, Oliver, Callaghan, & Woodcock, 2015; Hume, Sreckovic, Snyder, & Carnahan, 2014), so managing a number of different teachers from year to year, not to mention within one year, is often more difficult for children with disabilities and impedes their achievement.

Unfortunately, the statistics about teacher attrition in special education are alarming. According to Thornton, Peltier, & Medina (2007), about 98% of the school districts nationwide have shortages of special education teachers, and many positions are filled with uncertified or inadequately trained teachers. Studies show that there is a more severe shortage and higher turnover rate of special education teachers than in general education (Billingsley 2005; Boe, 2006; Duffy & Forgan, 2005), and many more special education teachers transfer to general education than the reverse (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Billingsley 2005; Boe et al., 1998). Many qualified teachers who are hired leave their positions in high-need schools by the end of their third year (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Billingsley (2005) maintained that, "some states . . . report that up to 32% of their special education teachers are not fully certified for their main assignments" (p. 33). These statistics are disturbing for all concerned - school administrators who need to fill special education positions, general education teachers who need special education experts to help their

students with special needs succeed, and families who want their children with special needs to have the best opportunities to learn.

The most damaging result of this trend is for the children with disabilities. Students with special needs benefit by having access to well trained, experienced teachers (Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004; Cale, Delpino, & Myran, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). The extreme shortage in special education in the United States has created a demand for teachers trained by alternative means, while the number of special education teachers graduating from traditional programs has declined (Berry, 2012). Teachers trained in alternative programs sometimes have no coursework or field experience in special education, and have a higher attrition rate than those from traditional programs (Billingsley, 2004a; Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004). Some researchers maintain that nearly one million children with special needs in the United States either receive services from untrained or inadequately trained educators, or do not receive mandated services at all due to special education teacher mobility and attrition (Brownell et al., 2002; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). An investigation of the causes of attrition could lead to policies and practices to ameliorate them, and therefore increase special education teacher retention.

Causes of Special Education Teacher Attrition

One critical analysis of the research on special education attrition from 1992 to 2004 enumerated factors that affect teacher attrition, including lack of administrative support, school climate, and unclear school roles (Billingsley, 2004a). Other researchers also uncovered issues of stress (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Billingsley, 2005; Weston, 2013), intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013;

Greenfield, 2015), and the availability of other positions to encourage mobility (Morvant et al., 1995; Whitaker, 2003). Research related to each factor follows.

Lack of administrative support. Hughes and O'Reilly (2015) suggested a definition of *administrative support* as "the principal taking an active role in assisting, encouraging, and displaying approving attitudes towards teachers" (p. 130). Lack of administrative support is one factor that appeared often in the findings of studies on teacher attrition. Many researchers avoided a definition of *support*, but instead included detailed lists of activities that administrators could do to encourage their teachers to stay. One of the most important responsibilities of district and school administrators is to staff their schools with the most qualified teachers they can find (Billingsley, 2005; Maynes & Hatt, 2013), and to provide the support necessary to encourage them to stay. If they cannot provide the conditions to persuade teachers to stay, they are faced with the consequences of teacher attrition. These consequences may include a frequent need to hire and train special education teachers, which costs the school both time and money (Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). Administrators also experience the potential negative effect on special education staff morale (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), which in turn may increase attrition.

Administrators may also not realize the effect of special education teacher attrition on students' achievement outcomes. Cale, Delpino and Myran (2015) maintained that the achievement of students with special needs suffers because of high special education teacher turnover. The authors surmised that school principals might not realize the importance of their involvement in the retention of special education staff. They suggested that principals may not be very familiar with special education issues, or might be overworked and unable to make time for the support needed. However, qualified special educators who remain in their positions and make a positive impact on student outcomes consider support from the school principal one of the most

important factors in their job satisfaction and success (Billingsley, 2005; Prather-Jones, 2011; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

A large body of research suggests that the support administrators provide special education teachers has a great deal to do with their decisions to stay or leave their jobs (Abbey & Esposito, 1985; Berry, 2012; Bozonelos, 2008; Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Cancio, et al., 2013; Correa & Wagner, 2011; Garner & Forbes, 2013; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Gersten et al., 2001; Kaff, 2004; Major, 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012; Whitaker, 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). For example, Abbey and Esposito's (1985) study examined the relationships between teacher perspectives of their reasons for complying with their principals' requests and the amount of social support they perceive from their principals. Over 200 participants from one large school completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire used a rank ordering of response to principal requests according to perceived importance. The researchers found that teachers perceived significantly less social support from their principal if they felt coerced into compliance, and more support from their principal if they felt the principal had "expert or referent power" (p. 331), indicating they had more respect for the principal's expertise and authority.

A review covering research from 1979-2013 targeted special education teacher attrition specifically (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). The search criteria for the review included empirical studies with quantitative measures of stress or burnout in public or private school settings, with differentiated outcomes for special education teachers. Each article constructed a clearly explained analysis section, and was published in a peer-reviewed journal in the United States between 1979 and 2013. The authors discovered that teacher dissatisfaction was often a result of lack of administrative support. They encouraged research in the area of "interventions

for principals and administration targeting role conflict, role ambiguity, and supporting teachers to build upon the current knowledge base" (p. 704). Another literature review by Bozonelos (2008) found similar results, and the author maintained that administrators need to create appropriate professional development opportunities and communicate often with special educators to let them know that they are appreciated and to create a collaborative climate.

Several large quantitative studies on special education teacher attrition and retention also attested to the importance of administrator support to encourage retention of special education teachers (Cancio et al., 2013; Kaff, 2004; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). The largest of these, by Sedivy-Benton and Boden McGill (2012), used data from the 2007 Schools and Staffing Survey by the National Center for Education Statistics. Their study examined the variables involving the teachers' perceptions of the workplace using a multiple regression model to examine intentions to stay or leave. They found that principals or district administrators could directly control many of the factors that encourage teachers to stay, such as controlling workloads and caseloads, helping with schedules, and reducing role conflict. In a similar quantitative study of teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, Kaff (2004) used questionnaires and also found that teachers often cite lack of administrative support as a factor in their decision to leave. Unlike the others, Kaff made several practical suggestions. She maintained that administrators need to make sure general education teachers and paraprofessionals receive adequate training in how to work with special education teachers and the students with special needs. The author also concluded that special education teachers should receive compensation for the extra duties and additional responsibilities they have, including long meetings that extend well after the school day. Kaff stated that administrators should ensure time for the special education teachers to collaborate with their general education peers and to communicate

regularly with the administrator. It is interesting to note that nearly half of the 341 respondents in Kaff's study intended to leave the field within the next five years, partly in response to work overload and lack of support. This is another example of how lack of administrative support leads to special education teacher attrition.

Like Kaff (2004), other researchers surveyed a large number of educators working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders to ascertain why the attrition rate of those special education teachers was so high (Cancio et al., 2013). The authors maintained that the attrition rate of special education teachers working with students with emotional and behavior disorders is higher than in all other areas of special education. The researchers found a significant correlation between intent to stay in the field and administrative support. However, the study was exploratory and not tested for reliability and validity. The authors surmised that some administrators might not be very familiar with special education, or they might be overworked themselves and unable to make time for the support needed. They suggested that administrators might not realize that teacher attrition may cost them more time and energy in the future with hiring and training new staff.

Recommended policies and practices to increase administrative support. Several attrition studies made specific recommendations about changing the practices of school administrators to increase retention of special education teachers (Kaff, 2004; Bozonelos, 2008). In an article geared toward leadership practitioners, Billingsley (2010) detailed nine specific recommendations that could be implemented by administrators to improve the work lives of new special education teachers. She advised principals to carefully consider new applicants' match for the specific job opening in the special education department by comparing their experience and education to the requirements for the position. Billingsley recommended that principals create an

atmosphere of school-wide support for the special education teachers and students in order to help teachers feel appreciated and to best address students with special needs as a team. Additionally, the author recommended that principals offer appropriate professional development geared toward special education teachers' individual needs, and grant them the time to attend such sessions during school hours by providing substitute teachers. She stressed the importance of providing support with curriculum and materials, and a schedule allowing time for collaboration. Billingsley also suggested a protected status for new special education teachers by controlling workloads and providing extra support from mentors or directly from administrators. Although her recommendations were aimed at leaders of new special educators, her suggestions may be beneficial to special education teachers at any stage of their careers.

Implementation of administrative support recommendations. Some researchers offer suggestions for how to enact these or similar recommendations. One suggestion was to guarantee that pre-service leadership education include sufficient coursework on special education issues to make sure administrators are knowledgeable about the specific needs of special education teachers and students before taking on a leadership role (Lynch, 2012; Schaaf, Williamson, & Novak, 2015). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) recommended district policy changes such as mandated staff development for administrators and teacher leaders to make them aware of the need for special education teacher support, and to give them the tools required to help increase special education teacher retention in their schools. Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) maintained that state or district policy should require limits on teacher caseloads, factoring in the number of grade levels taught, the severity of the students' disabilities, and the years of experience of the teacher.

Stress and burnout. Research identified stress and burnout as another major reason special education teachers leave the field. Many teachers decide to transfer to general education to escape the perceived higher level of stress in special education (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Brunsting et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). While people can experience stress in any field (House, 1981), stress that is so severe that it leads to burnout and resignation of employment in large numbers is more common than it should be in the field of special education. Stress is one of the leading factors in special education teachers' decisions to leave their positions, or leave teaching altogether (Abbey & Esposito, 1985; Adera & Bullock, 2010; Billingsley, 2005; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) studied special education teacher stress levels related to job design. They sent questionnaires to 887 special education teachers in three large western school districts, and used statistical analysis to determine the factors that influenced teachers' intent to stay. The researchers maintained that, "stress due to poor job design is found in the discrepancy between what teachers believe about their jobs (i.e., that they are there to teach children with disabilities) and the realities of their jobs (i.e., burdensome paperwork loads, extensive time spent in meetings, limited opportunities for individualization, and huge ranges in student performance levels)" (pp. 562-563). They found stress to be a critical factor in teachers' decisions to leave. The teachers in the study related feelings of stress due to the amount of paperwork, legal and bureaucratic requirements, severity of students' disabilities, conflicting expectations, and problems with student behavior. The authors of the study maintained that there is a critical need to change special education teachers' job design, especially in light of the number of special education teachers transferring to general education due to stress.

Other researchers found some of the same factors causing stress for special education teachers. For example, Billingsley (2005) maintained that the most significant stress factors for special educators that are not generally experienced by general educators include, "high caseloads, excessive paperwork, inadequate planning time (individual and with colleagues), inadequate leadership support, teacher isolation, insufficient focus on student learning, [and] lack of instructional and technological resources" (p. 21). In addition, the author outlined the factors most often causing stress in special education according to stress inventories. Twenty-one factors were included, grouped in four categories – work assignment problems, inadequate support, relationship concerns, and lack of rewards.

Stress experienced by special education teachers affects the whole school. Billingsley (2004) pointed out that, "teachers who feel stressed, overburdened, and unsupported will also have less energy for new learning, supporting others, and trying new approaches to teaching" (p. 375). Teachers experiencing stress are also more likely to be absent, depressed, ill, or exhausted (Billingsley, 2005). In addition, the author pointed out that high stress levels might also lead to low morale, and therefore increase attrition, or mobility into general education. Because stress is such a significant factor in burnout and attrition for special education teachers, the research identified policies and practices that may reduce stress and, if implemented, may lead to greater retention of special education teachers.

Recommended policies and practices to alleviate special education teacher stress. The policies and practices of administrative support and stress overlap, as many of the recommendations to alleviate stress fall to school administrators. For example, Billingsley's (2005) two-fold approach to reduce stress for special education teachers relied on increased principal support. She suggested that principals review and reform the organizational design for special education

departments and teach staff coping strategies to alleviate stress. She maintained that special educators need strong leaders who can design appropriate work assignments, facilitate mentorships and collaboration, provide induction support for new special educators, and offer needs-based professional development to reduce stress in their work.

In a literature review about occupational stress for special education teachers, Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) suggested peer support systems to mitigate feelings of isolation leading to stress. To further alleviate stress among new special education teachers, the authors suggested matching new teachers with veteran colleagues in a mentorship role, an idea also championed by others both to prevent stress and to improve job performance (Duffy & Forgan, 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Israel, Kamman, McCray, & Sindelar, 2014; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).

Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) reviewed literature about causes and solutions for special education teacher burnout. They suggested several practical steps for alleviating stress, including 1) making sure that pre-service special educators become acquainted with the stress-inducing factors of the field in advance, in order to give them time to consider appropriate responses and preventative solutions, 2) offering new special educators professional development to learn to identify stress factors and to develop ways to analyze and manage the symptoms, and 3) reducing caseloads of new special education teachers so they do not become overwhelmed with the demands of the job their first year.

Administrative support and on-the-job stress are both extrinsic factors, meaning factors that stem from the environment and may be able to be changed. Such environmental factors may make special education teacher want to leave, or, if well structured, may encourage them to stay. Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) identified other extrinsic factors that may encourage teachers to stay including salary increases, greater opportunity for advancement, and organizational factors

such as better job design, caseload limits, more help with scheduling, and opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. Intrinsic factors include teachers' personality, predisposition to teach, desire to work with children, feeling that they can make a difference, and satisfaction when children achieve milestones because of their work (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013). It is often intrinsic factors that attract teachers to the field of special education initially, and there seems to be a relationship between the strength of intrinsic motivation and the desire of teachers to stay, or their resilience to withstand the negative factors for a greater good (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013; Greenfield, 2015). While it is debatable if intrinsic factors can be greatly changed, researchers believe changes in the extrinsic factors may make a significant difference to increase special education teacher retention (Bennett et al., 2013; Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012).

Implementation of stress and burnout avoidance recommendations. Policy issues impact schools directly and can create conditions that could reduce stress and encourage special education teachers to stay (Brownell et al., 2002; Carter & Leslie, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Washburn-Moses, 2010). Researchers maintained that state and district policies should address caseload limits for special education teachers based on number of grade levels taught, severity of the students' disabilities, and years of experience of the special education teacher (Brownell et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). More overarching recommendations to attract skilled teachers and encourage experienced teachers to stay, according to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), include salary increases, incentives for teacher recruitment in high-need areas, paying teacher training costs, and the creation of networks to provide mentoring and professional development to increase teacher support. Such policies could go a long way in help-

ing school districts retain good special education teachers in order to serve children with special needs well.

Retention of Special Education Teachers

Administrative support and stress are two of the most often cited factors for teacher attrition. But research on attrition is not the only way to approach the problem. Studies on teacher retention help district leaders and administrators find out what works, and what they can do to encourage their special education teachers to stay (Billingsley, 2005; Boe et al., 1998; Gersten et al., 2001). In addition to the benefits for students' learning outcomes, retaining experienced special education teachers would help schools save money on hiring and training (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). In my literature search, research on teacher retention was not as evident as that on attrition, but there are some studies that lay the groundwork.

For example, for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, Prather-Jones (2011) focused on the positive impact of administrators on the decision of teachers to stay in the field. She studied 13 teachers who had each taught in the field for seven years or more, recruited both purposefully and through snowball sampling. Given that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders are not hard to locate, it is surprising that snowball sampling (where a few study participants seek more among their acquaintances) was necessary, and that only 13 participants were recruited. However, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, twice for some participants, as well as a focus group and member checking. She found that principals heavily influenced the reasons the teachers stayed in the field. She concluded that administrators must have knowledge of the job responsibilities of special education teachers and what is expected of them on a daily basis. Prather-Jones stated that principals should ensure that the

teachers feel supported, have good working conditions, are not overworked, have necessary materials, and have time in their schedules to plan and collaborate.

One study conducted in Australia (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012) explored the relationship between the reasons teachers were initially attracted to the field of special education and how that compared to their reasons for staying. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with five retired special education teachers and conducted a survey of 31 teachers currently in the field. They found that teachers were generally attracted to the field for intrinsic reasons, which they described as "personal characteristics, such as enjoying working with children, finding teaching intellectually fulfilling, that teaching helps them contribute to society, teaching a subject they loved, or being positive role models" (p. 26). They found, however, that extrinsic factors, such as positive working conditions, good curricula, and fewer non-teaching duties helped lead to long-term retention. They ultimately concluded that, "retention is not just about addressing concerns related to the working conditions and work environment, such as salary parity, workload and the work environment, but also about maintaining and nurturing that high level of intrinsic motivation" (p. 30).

Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, and Severson (2013) came to similar conclusions in their phenomenological study of two novice and two experienced special education teachers. They conducted interviews and analyzed data using taxonomic and domain analysis to discover why the teachers intended to stay in the field. They concluded that both novice and experienced teachers considered the relationship to their students as an important factor in their decision to stay, as well as "influences of the heart" (p. 573), referring to love of the profession. These findings relate directly to the intrinsic motivation mentioned by Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012). An-

other study found that an atmosphere of social and emotional respect and collegial relationships encouraged teachers to stay in the field (Bennet et al., 2013).

A study about principal support as a factor of retention in hard to staff schools (Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015) explored the specific emotional, environmental, instructional, and technical supports that could be offered by principals. They used a Likert scale survey from 17 administrators and 41 teachers. Their statistical analysis revealed a high correspondence between emotional support as a factor in teachers' intention to stay, followed by environmental support. One interesting finding when comparing the administrators' and teachers' surveys, was that administrators perceived they gave more support than the teachers felt they received from principals.

Another retention study (Hughes, 2012) surveyed teachers in any field and working at any level, with 82 of the 772 participants in special education. They found that 83.5% of the teachers surveyed planned to teach until retirement. The sample was self-selective, so the teachers who chose to respond may have been more motivated in general, and therefore more likely to be planning to continue teaching until retirement. A higher level of experienced teachers (10 or more years) planned to continue until retirement than newer teachers. The relationship with both students and parents was also a factor in teachers' decisions to stay, while low salary and high workloads, factors that attribute to stress, had the opposite effect. The researchers encountered one unexpected, but statistically significant finding, that teachers in schools in areas with lower socio-economic status (SES) had a higher retention rate than teachers working in areas with higher SES. This may be because neighborhoods with lower SES may have fewer job opportunities that are better - pay more or offer better working conditions - whereas teachers working in neighborhoods with high SES may be more well off themselves and therefore able to find other

jobs, afford to live off one family salary, or afford to pay tuition to return to school for additional certification, graduate level degrees, or training in another field.

Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014) brought in a different view on the retention of experienced teachers. They conducted research about the engagement of what they termed "second-stage teachers" (p. 234), which they defined as teachers with 4-10 years of experience. They conducted interviews with 12 participants, six from each of two public high schools in the same state. They found that second stage teachers enjoy increased confidence, efficacy, and independence. However, the authors found that the engagement in the work of teaching changed for most of the teachers. Some dug deeper into their pedagogy by trying new things, others became more active in the school or district in other ways, and still others devoted more time to non-teaching activities outside of school. Of the 12 teachers interviewed, four planned to leave within two to five years and one was unsure. The authors concluded that second stage teachers warrant more attention from school and district leaders to increase retention of these experienced teachers.

Attrition and Retention Literature In Relation to the Current Study

Each of the research studies on attrition and retention as a whole, despite limitations, adds another angle or another insight to the problem of special education teacher retention. However, none of the studies I found focused on the specific situation of special education teacher retention in small schools. Several of the attrition studies reinforced the impact of principal leadership on special education with large samples or at large schools (Abbey & Esposito, 1985; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012), and others focused on teachers working with specific special populations (Cancio et al, 2013; Kaff, 2004). The literature reviews on attrition included studies of schools of any size and with various student populations (Brunsting et al., 2014; Bozonelos, 2008). In their study, Cale et al. (2015) referred to "small to mid-sized urban school districts,"

but did not specifically include schools with small student populations, and referred to research that focused on schools of any size.

The studies on retention, although aligned with my proposed study, focused on high school special education teachers (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012, Bennett et al., 2013; Hughes, 2012; Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014; Prather-Jones, 2011), whereas I propose to research primary schools (PK and K-3), which have some specific challenges for teachers, as I will discuss below. All of the studies I reviewed conducted research on teachers working in schools of any size, whereas I will focus on small (<500 student population) schools, which I will elaborate on in the next section. Some of the studies researched specific populations (Cancio et al., 2013; Prather-Jones, 2011) or foreign locations (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012), or had very small sample sizes (Prather-Jones, 2011; Bennett et al., 2013; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). More research, like the present study on special education teacher retention in small schools, would provide information on the specific factors that can be changed or improved to help teachers make the decision to stay (Otto & Arnold, 2005; Prather-Jones, 2011; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). What is missing in the literature I have found is the specific case of small schools, where special educators serve students with various disabilities but have special circumstances to contend with.

Small Schools and Special Education

Background on small schools. According to the Education Resources Information Center, small schools were the norm well into the twentieth century (Barker, 1986). The report stated that 300 students or fewer was the most commonly used number to label a school small, and that principals played a stronger role in instruction and related to students directly more than in large schools. The number of students necessary to consider a school small is debated. Small school

advocates maintained that the ideal size for a public school was no more that 300-400 students, and claimed that schools serving more than 400 students cannot be effective (Bingler et al., 2002; Lee & Loeb, 2000). In a study of special education in New York City public schools, Jessen (2012) defined small schools as those "enrolling fewer than 600 students" (p. 463), but added that some schools over 600, but which were "known to have been developed as part of the small school reforms" (p. 463), could also be labeled small. Heath (2006) indicated that the most effective size for elementary schools was between 300 and 400 students. His literature review offered both general and special education teachers rationale to remain working in the small school environment. The study concluded that small schools have better communication between teachers and principals, and more collaboration among staff. They are more likely than large schools to go about school improvement in a systematic way, and teachers have more positive attitudes about school leadership and parent involvement. Several studies described the pros and cons of small schools, both urban and rural (Bouck, 2004; Corbett, 2013; Lay, 2007, Kauts & Chechi, 2010). Because the definition of small school ranges from 300 to 600, for the purpose of this study I will use 500.

Special education in small schools. Although no statistics are given specifically about special education departments, the fact that administrators can directly address individual problems with both teachers and students suggests that special education teachers may find more access to administrative support in small schools. However, a research study on small schools in New York City found that small schools often had fewer resources for students with special needs. The small schools studied in New York used the inclusion model - supporting students in the general education environment - for most of the students with special needs, as opposed to the self-contained model - a separate classroom in the school for students with severe disabilities

where a special education teacher is responsible to teach all academic subjects with the assistance of paraprofessionals (Jessen, 2013). The small schools in the study served less than half the number of students (by percentage) in the self-contained model as the large schools did. Students in self-contained classrooms often require high levels of intervention in communication and self-help skills. The model requires hiring more teachers and assistants, providing more space, and using more assistive technology equipment, which may be difficult for small schools to provide.

Leadership for special educators in small schools. According to Cale et al. (2015), there is a gap in research on instructional leadership in small to mid-sized schools, specifically in the area of special education. The researchers were interested in the impact of instructional leadership on learning. They suggested five areas that would be important in special education leadership for teachers in special education: communication, staff development, teacher evaluation, instructional programming, and instructional design. Cale et al. maintained that there is a substantial increase in principals' responsibilities with the advent of instructional leadership, an area that is often delegated to others in the school (instructional coaches, lead teachers, outside consultants). The researchers emphasized the importance of principal involvement in increasing the achievement of all students, including those with special needs. They determined a connection between lack of instructional leadership and decreased achievement, especially for special education students. They concluded that principals need more training in special education in order to provide instructional support for their teachers. One limitation of the study is that the authors do not specifically distinguish between small, mid-sized, and large schools, and cite research on instructional leadership based on schools of any size.

Perspectives of support for special education teachers in small schools. Several studies explored the perspective of special education teachers and described their experience. For ex-

ample, Berry (2012) examined the work-related support in relation to the satisfaction and commitment for special education teachers in rural areas. Although Berry did not mention the size of the schools in the study, rural schools were traditionally small (Provasnik et al., 2007; Yan, 2006). Berry conducted a phone survey with over 200 rural teachers and concluded that there was a direct link between teacher satisfaction and certain areas of support, including support from administrators and general education teachers, as well as other people who help take responsibility for the students with special needs in the school. The results of my study on small schools provided interesting connections in this area.

Gersten et al. (2001) surveyed over 800 teachers in three large school districts to uncover their perceptions of support. Instead of asking factual questions, such as the number of professional development opportunities they were offered, they asked the teachers to what extent they *felt* there were opportunities to expand learning on the job. The focus on teacher perception is similar to my study, but the perspective and job design of teachers at small schools may be different, and large school districts usually comprise large schools.

Several other researchers studied teachers' perception of control and perceived support (Adera, 2010; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012). In one study, Adera (2010) used surveys and focus groups to study the perceptions of teachers of students with emotional behavior disorders about the factors that caused them stress, which led to dissatisfaction with their jobs. Otto and Arnold (2005) studied experienced special education teachers' perceptions of administrative support. They found that teachers with more than five years of experience generally found their administrators supportive, in contrast to the perceptions of teachers with less than five years of experience. The results of my research described the way teachers with different years of experience in small schools felt about administrative support as well.

Special Education in Small Schools Literature in Relation to the Current Study

The literature reviewed on special education teacher retention was varied but not as numerous as the literature on attrition. Many studies researched teachers' perceptions of the factors that increase retention (Adera, 2010; Gersten et al., 2001; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012), but those studies focused on large school systems or teachers working with special populations. Some studies drew attention to only one specific factor that may increase retention, such as instructional leadership or administrative support (Cale et al., 2015; Otto & Arnold, 2005). Berry's (2012) study may have the most similarity to mine, but the survey included rural schools of any size, regardless of the trend to consolidate many rural schools to create larger rural schools (Provasnik et al., 2007; Yan, 2006). Berry's (2012) method of phone surveys also does not approach the in-depth qualitative research I conducted to understand teachers' perspectives on the organizational and individual factors of support at their schools that affect their decision to stay in the field in a small school.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature, it is clear that retention of special education teachers is a problem for schools (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Swars et al., 2009). Teacher turnover in special education affects children with special needs both emotionally and academically, resulting in lower achievement levels (Bull, Oliver, Callaghan, & Woodcock, 2015; Hume, Sreckovic, Snyder, & Carnahan, 2014). The factors affecting special education teacher attrition are important to utilize in my study, because they are the reasons for low retention levels. The administrative factors were demonstrated to have significant positive or negative effects on special education teacher retention and were also useful to my study. These included providing specific, needs-based professional development

and training, providing resources, allowing time to collaborate with peers, controlling work loads, communicating regularly, creating a school-wide atmosphere of appreciation for the work of special educators and a team-oriented approach to providing services for students with special needs (Kaff, 2004; Billingsley, 2010; Bozonelos, 2008). In addition, administrators should have knowledge of the job duties of special educators and the needs of students with special needs (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Lynch, 2012; Schaaf, Williamson, & Novak, 2015).

Other factors affecting attrition and retention highlighted in the literature also emerged in my study, including stress due to job design (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Brunsting et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), workload (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012), isolation (Billingsley, 2005; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), and disappointment with the inability to focus on student learning (Billingsley, 2005). Other hypotheses from the literature involved the availability of jobs to encourage teacher mobility (Morvant et al., 1995; Whitaker, 2003), as well as the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that play a role in attrition and retention (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Greenfield, 2015). The results of this study explicated how these factors affect small schools.

Literature about the benefits of small schools was also abundant (Bingler et al., 2002; Jessen, 2012; Lee & Loeb, 2000), and some research advocated for the intersection of special education and small schools and suggested further research (Dukes & Lamar-Dukes, 2006). What was missing was information specifically about the perspective of special education teachers about the support they experience in small schools, and how their experience affected their decision to stay in the field and in the small school environment. The goal of this study was to address this gap in order to further the search for solutions to retain good teachers in special education in all schools.

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to describe the perspectives of experienced special education teachers in small PK or K-3 schools and explain the organizational and individual factors that influence their decision to stay in their schools. My research questions were:

1. What are the perspectives of experienced special education teachers working in small PK or K-3 schools about the organizational and individual factors that affect their decision to continue teaching special education in a small school?
2. Which factors of employment are most important to special education teachers at all levels of experience in the small PK and K-3 schools to promote retention?
3. What are the principals' perceptions about which factors affect special education teacher retention in their small PK or K-3 school, and how do their views coincide with the teachers' perspectives?

The results of my study added to the knowledge about teacher retention to fill the gap in the literature about the retention of experienced special educators in small schools, and thereby influenced the retention of small school special educators in a positive way.

Designs Considered

As a novice researcher, I considered several methodological options to answer my research questions within the social constructionist framework. Because my questions focused on perspectives and experiences of participants, I first considered phenomenological research. The description offered by Creswell (2014) appealed to me. He referred to phenomenology as a de-

sign "in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 14). But as I explored the phenomenological approach, there were some aspects that did not fit my worldview. The philosophical assumptions behind phenomenology did not match my social constructionist framework, such as the assumption that "there is an essence or essences to shared experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). The practice of the researcher deliberately "bracketing" (Bogdan, 1973), or putting his or her experience and viewpoints aside in order to focus on the essence of the phenomenon was also not part of my worldview or emic perspective (Pike, 1967), as my own experiences have fostered my interest in the problem and my commitment to more clearly understanding and mitigating it. In addition, a phenomenological study focuses on a "single concept or idea" (p. 78), whereas I wanted to explore a wide range of perspectives about many factors of teachers' experience, and, although the teachers I studied were all in one small school district, they were not all in the same school with the same leadership and environment, so were not necessarily experiencing the exact same phenomenon.

So I considered my personal worldview and my social constructionist framework, as I described earlier, including my belief that knowledge was constructed by human experience, and can only be obtained by face-to-face interactions with participants. Therefore I chose a multiple-case study for my research. The study was designed in two phases, with quantitative data from a questionnaire and documents collected and analyzed first, the results of which informed iteratively the next, qualitative phase, that included individual interviews with key informants. I explain my rationale for the case study methodology below.

Research Design

My rationale for using a multiple-case study approach arose out of my theoretical framework as a social constructionist. I believed knowledge was constructed by human experience, and that interaction with participants and the use of multiple data sources was imperative to gain understanding of how they created meaning out of their experience. I aligned my case study methodology with the design developed by Yin (2003). According to Yin, case studies were particularly useful when asking "how" and "why" questions, and when real-life phenomena were being examined. I investigated a phenomenon in a particular real life context that had not been sufficiently analyzed in the literature. My study on the factors affecting teacher decisions was an exploratory question, essentially asking the question *how* the experienced teachers made their decision, and *why* they stayed. In my study, because the possible factors affecting teacher retention decisions were so numerous, I made use of many kinds of data, including quantitative data as another form of evidence, as suggested by Yin (2003).

Given the context of my study within six small schools, there was no one critical case that was either especially unique or perfectly representative of the experienced teachers in the context I was investigating. Therefore, I employed a multiple-case design. My use of more than one case teacher made my study more compelling and my data more comprehensive. Four cases gave the study greater possibilities for analysis and resulted in more powerful conclusions than could be determined by a single case (Yin, 2003).

Context of the Study

The context of my multiple-case study was a small city school district nestled in a larger county district within a metropolitan area in the southeast United States. The district's overall performance was better than 98% of the other districts in the state and 79.8% of third graders

read at or above grade level (Governor's Office of Student Achievement [GOSA], 2016). According to the GOSA report, the student mobility rate was 4.7%, and the per-pupil student expenditure was $11,406, almost $300 higher than that of the state. Fourteen percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and 2% were English language learners. Taxes in the district were high, mostly because of the school system. About 60% of the city's tax bill went toward the school system (from city government administrative services taxes and fees FAQ; citation vague for blinding purposes). The district had 4661 students at the time of this study. The district comprised one preschool (birth to five), five small primary (kindergarten through third grade) schools, one school for fourth and fifth graders, a middle school and a high school. The pre-kindergarten program at the preschool and the five K-3 schools were the focus of my study, and they ranged in size from 265 to 464 students. Historically the schools had all been very small, and racially, culturally, and economically mixed, but the district had begun growing rapidly. According to the superintendent's office (csdsupt.wordpress.com), the enrollment in 2009-2010 was 2,687 students. The enrollment in 2016-2017 was 5,040 students, an 87.6% increase over 2009. Student numbers had increased, incomes had risen, and, as the cost of houses steadily increased, the student body became more affluent and less racially diverse. According to the principal's blog, the percentage of non-white students decreased by more than 8% between the years 2009-2016 (Principal's Blog, wordpress.com, citation vague for blinding purposes). In 2002, when my daughter started kindergarten in the city, there were so few children in the school that they did not have enough students to create two classes at each grade level, so they created a combined kindergarten/first grade class. The largest K-3 school was expected to approach 500 students within a few years of my study, because it had the largest facility with the greatest number of classrooms. However, even at 500, that school could be labeled small as described by Jes-

sen (2012), who purported that some schools over 600 which were "developed as part of the small school reforms" (p. 463) could also be labeled small. Even the largest district K-3 school was expected to retain its small school character and philosophy by using the same learning model as the other schools, the same curricula, and the same way of celebrating learning by inviting families in each Friday for special presentations by the classes.

Special education services were available at all six of the small PK and K-3 schools, but only four of the schools had self-contained classes where students age six and older with more severe needs received 60% or more of their instruction in a separate class with one teacher and one or more assistants. Students requiring those services were served only at those schools. Depending on the size of the school and the number of students with special needs, the schools had from two to four special education teachers, and had two or three paraprofessionals in special education, usually serving students in the self-contained class. In the district PK and K-3 schools there were 17 special education teachers and 14 special education paraprofessionals in all. The principal at each school was responsible for supervising special education teachers and providing the support necessary to accomplish their work and to ensure that the students received the legally mandated services stipulated on their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). A district level special education coordinator met with K-3 special education inclusion teachers every 6-8 weeks, with teachers serving more severe needs in self-contained classes separately, and with PK teachers more often. A director of student services who managed special education, gifted education, English language learning, psychological services, occupational/physical therapy, social work support, nursing care, and family engagement programs also supported teachers dealing with students with severe behavior problems or the concerns of parents. Both of the district ad-

ministrators made themselves available to attend IEP meetings in cases that may have involved complex legal or family issues.

Participants

Sixteen special education teachers agreed to participate in Phase 1 of my study. One of the 17 teachers in PK-3rd grade had declined due to time constraints. Fourteen of the participants were currently working in special education in the PK or K-3 setting, one had just taken a position as Instructional Coach at her school after five years as a special educator, and one was a retired special education teacher with 38 years of experience in the district schools. The teachers were mostly Caucasian and female with the exception of one African American woman and the retired teacher who was male. The teachers worked in either self-contained or inclusion settings, with students with various disabilities including Specific Learning Disabilities, Autism, Significantly Developmentally Delayed, Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, Mild/Moderate/Profound Intellectual Disabilities, Other Health Impairments, and/or Speech or Language Impairments. Although the retired teacher did not currently work in the schools, I decided his input would shed light on the themes of this study, so I included him as a participant. The demographics of the 16 teachers who completed the questionnaire are listed in Table 1.

From that participant group, I purposefully chose and invited experienced teachers from any of the six schools to participate in Phase 2 of the study. Because of my focus on retention, this smaller sample consisted of special education teachers who had five or more years of experience working in PK or K-3 special education in the district and had given informed consent. I chose these criteria based on my research questions, which specifically required the participation of special education teachers who had worked in the district's small PK or K-3 schools for five or more years. All volunteers meeting those criteria were accepted as participants. I found three

teachers in this group. All three agreed to participate, and each became a focus case. Additionally, the retired teacher was included as a focus teacher for a total of four focus case teachers. Although the retired teacher did not currently work in the schools, and therefore had no caseload

Table 1

Demographics of the 16 Participant Teachers Who Completed the Questionnaire

1. Teacher Special Education Experience	**Number**	**Percentage**
Teachers with previous special education experience	16	100%
2. Teacher Experience in the District		
Teachers who worked in the district PK-3 schools between 1-4 years	11	69%
Teachers who worked in the district PK-3 schools between 5-9 years	3	19%
Teachers who worked in the district PK-3 schools between 10-15 years	1	6%
Teachers who worked in the district PK-3 schools more than 15 years	1	6%
3. Teachers' Plans to Remain in District		
Teachers under 55 years old who planned to stay until retirement	8	55%
Teachers over 55 years old who planned to stay until retirement	1	6%
Teachers who planned to stay "a few more years."	2	13%
Teachers who planned to stay "a long time."	3	19%
Teachers who were unsure how long they will stay in the district	2	13%

or schedule, I decided to include him as a case teacher for the interview phase because of his rich experience and historical perspective. Because my emic perspective is an important factor in the study, I will include my own demographic information as a reference. The demographics of the four case teachers and myself as the researcher are displayed in Table 2. Case teacher names are pseudonyms.

Additional participants included the district Director of Student Support Services, the district Special Education Coordinator and four of the six principals who worked in the schools

(Table 3). The other two principals declined to participate due to time constraints. The district Director of Student Support Services, Maureen, had worked in special education in the district for 20 years, and worked with children with autism for many years before coming to the district. In addition to her other responsibilities, she was responsible for hiring, managing, training, and program development for special education, including the speech therapists, occupational

Table 2

Demographics of the Four Case Teachers Participating in Phase 2 and the Researcher

Case Teacher Pseudonym	Age	Education	Years of Previous Experience in Special Education	Years of Experience Teaching Special Education in the District	Special Education Delivery Model	Grade Level Served
Lindsey Case Teacher 1	48	Master's and Specialist degree (Special Education)	9	13	½ self-contained ½ inclusion	PK
Naomi Case Teacher 2	57	Specialist (Special Education)	26	7	Inclusion	3rd
Rebecca Case Teacher 3	54	Specialist (Special Education) and Leadership	25	5	Inclusion	1st/2nd
Ryan (Retired) Case Teacher 4 (questionnaire and interview only)	Not stated	Bachelors in Psychology, Master's in Moderate and Severe Special Education	7-8	38	Self-contained in another county	Worked with all ages during career
Researcher	54	Master's in Education; Doctorate in Curriculum & Instruction (expected 2017)	6	3	Inclusion	1st

therapists physical therapists, and other specialists and consultants.

The district Special Education Coordinator, Richard, was responsible for supporting the work of all the 58 special education teachers and 30 paraprofessionals in the district, who served the 456 special education students at all levels, PK through 12th grade (Numbers according to Maureen, the District Director of Student Support). He had worked at three of the district schools before taking on the position. He was responsible for providing training on best practices, IEP writing, assistive technology services, and other professional learning as required by the district.

Table 3

Demographics of the Administrators Participating in Phase 2

Administrator Pseudonym*	Position	Years in Position	Former position	Education
Maureen	District Director of Student Support Services	5 years	Special Education Coordinator	Bachelor's in Psychology, Masters in Education
Richard	Special Education Coordinator	3 years	6th grade inclusion teacher	Specialist in Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders
Rachel	Principal	3 years	Assistant Principal (HS)	Masters in Science Education & Masters in Education Leadership
Gary	Principal	11 years	Teacher; Instructional Coach	Masters of Education with Leadership Add-On
Dana	Principal	6 years	Instructional Coach	Specialist in Leadership
Sarah	Principal	11 years	Early Childhood Coordinator	Masters of Education in Leadership

Data Collection/Instruments/Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 and Phase 2. Phase 1 involved all 16 of the teacher participants and consisted of a Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire, Post-Meeting Response Forms (PMRFs), caseload lists, and teacher daily schedules. Phase 2 involved interviews with the four case teachers, and, because of the knowledge I gained from the literature review about the importance of administrators, I included interviews with the two district-level special education administrators, and four school principals. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods used in the study resulted in a more detailed and deeper account of the teachers' experience in the small school setting.

Phase 1. In the data collection for Phase 1, all 16 special education teachers who gave informed consent for the study participated in the Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire, for a 100% response rate. Only those present at the district K-3 special education meetings completed PMRFs. The retired teacher and the teacher who had transferred to the position of instructional coach did not attend those meetings, and there may have been other absences. Caseload lists were gathered from all 14 of the current special education teachers. Daily schedules were submitted by 12 of the 14 current teachers; two did not submit schedules despite repeated requests.

Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire. I used a modified version of the instrument *Working in Special Education: The Experiences of Special Educators* developed by Morvant, Gersten, Gillman, Keating, and Blake (1995) in their study on attrition and retention of urban special education teachers. Their questionnaire had nine demographic questions and 81 forced-choice Likert scale items. Based on a sample analysis of the questionnaire completed by 868 special educators and speech therapists in three cities, the authors reported reliability with an

alpha coefficient of .92. They maintained that this high reliability indicated that, "there is some overarching construct that this instrument measures" (Morvant, Gersten, Gillman, Keating, and Blake, 1995, p. 48).

I modified the instrument as *Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire* (see Appendix A) by converting all items to a 5-point Likert scale, and rewording some items to avoid reverse coding. All 81 of the questions were pertinent to the teachers in the district and to my research questions. I reduced the demographic questions from nine to five, deleting age, gender, teaching environment, and grade level, but retained questions about the number of years of teaching experience, number of those years in special education, and a multiple choice question, "How long do you plan to stay?" I added questions about how many years the teacher had worked in special education in the district, and how many of those years were at the PK-3 level. The Likert scale items had five responses, in this order: 1) Strongly Disagree – 2) Somewhat Disagree – 3) Neutral – 4) Somewhat Agree – 5) Strongly Agree. Sample items included: "Most of the other teachers in this school know what I do," "I receive feedback from the district special education administrator as often as I need it," and, "There are many rewards for being a special educator." The items were grouped into 14 categories, with a number of statements to respond to under each. The categories and number of statements in each are depicted in Table 4. All statements are included in Appendix A.

Before distributing the questionnaire to Phase 1 participants, I field-tested it with two non-participant teachers to gather feedback on the amount of time required to complete it and the clarity of the questions. Both field testers reported that the questionnaire took them less than half an hour to complete, and that the statements were clear. In my experience, the online Likert scale

format of questionnaires makes them easier and quicker to complete than a paper or face-to-face version, and the field testers agreed.

After establishing informed consent, I sent a letter to all teacher participants. I described the questionnaire and reminded them that it would be completed anonymously, so they were not

Table 4

Categories on the Questionnaire and Number of Items in Each

Category	**Number of Statements**
Relationship with Building Principal	11 statements
Central Office Relationships	7 statements
Relationship with Other Teachers at Your School	7 statements
Preparation for Current Assignment	12 statements
Stress Related To Job Design	7 statements
Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload	5 statements
Affective Issues Related to Students	7 statements
Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards	6 statements
Role Conflict	5 statements
Parent Support	3 statements
Opportunities for Growth and Advancement	3 statements
Autonomy	3 statements
Adequacy of Space	1 statement
Adequacy of Materials	2 statements

required to give their names or their specific school affiliations. I also reminded them that, as stated on the informed consent, the questionnaire may take up to 90 minutes to complete, but mentioned that field testing indicated that it might be done in far less time. Following the letter, I sent an email with a link to the questionnaire to all the participant special education teachers in the six schools in the district, including one pre-kindergarten teacher, the 13 teachers at the K-3 schools, the retired teacher, and the teacher who had transferred to the position of instructional coach after five years in special education, for a total of 16. The retired teacher and the teacher

who moved into administration based their responses on their most recent year working in PK-3 special education in the district.

The data collected in Phase 1 was intended to provide as comprehensive a description of factors affecting the teachers' decisions to stay or leave the small school environment as possible. The results served several purposes: to further describe the context of the study, answer the research question relating to important factors of the job affecting retention for teachers with any amount of experience, to compare perspectives of teachers with more experience in the district (five or more years) to those with less experience in the district (fewer than five years), and to inform the interview questions in Phase 2 in an iterative approach. Because pre- and post-notifications regarding e-mail questionnaires increase the response rate (Sheehan, 2001), I used pre-notification both in a recruitment email and in the informed consent document. After the original request and mailing of the link, I reminded teachers in person at two special education district meetings and used a post-notification email including the link to the questionnaire one more time after all but two had been returned. Since the questionnaires were anonymous, I had to send the final reminder and link to all, with appreciation to those who had already completed the questionnaire. Of the 16 requested, all 16 were submitted for a 100% response rate.

The questionnaire allowed me to describe the perspective of all the PK-3 special education teachers in the district to better understand the context in relation to my research questions, and gave me a basis of comparison between teachers with more or less experience about what influenced their retention decisions. I also used the quantitative data iteratively to develop interview questions such as, "There was a wide range of responses from teachers in the questionnaire about manageability of the workload. How does that affect you?" Appendices B and C include the original version of the teacher interview protocol and the revised version respectively.

Post-meeting Response Forms (PMRFs). Every four to six weeks the district special education coordinator planned a meeting for the K-3 special education teachers, and met with teachers serving students in pre-kindergarten and in the self-contained setting separately. The purpose of these meetings was to disseminate information, provide training, clarify procedures, announce forthcoming deadlines or opportunities, discuss issues, and ensure that special education processes were being followed the same way in each of the six schools.

As another data source to illuminate the effect of district administrative support for special education teachers, I developed a Post-Meeting Reaction Form (Appendix E) for participants to complete after each meeting from August until December. I wanted to ascertain how the teachers felt about the meetings, how or if the meetings affected their work, and if there was a difference in the responses for newer teachers versus more experienced teachers. I wanted the form to be quick and easy so I could get the information I needed without demanding too much time from the participants, and to increase the response rate. The form consisted of four questions. The first two were forced-choice demographic questions: 1) How many years have you worked in the district's PK-3 schools? Choose one: <5 or ≥ 5 years, and, 2) How did you feel about the meeting? It was (circle all that apply): fun, helpful, useful information, important, boring, waste of time, and other. The last two questions were open-ended: 3) What was discussed in today's meeting? 4) How will that impact your work?

I made the forms available at each meeting by passing them out as participant teachers entered, and supplied a large envelope for them to submit the completed documents. I collected the envelope and reviewed the documents after the meeting, and stored them with other data in my locked file cabinet. One planned meeting in August was canceled due to a technical problem with the invitations, but meetings were held as scheduled in September, October and November.

Caseload lists and teacher daily schedules. In addition to the PMRFs, I collected caseload lists from all 14 currently working teachers and daily schedules from 12 of the 14 teachers. Two did not respond to the request. The caseload lists were used to corroborate the teachers' responses to questions about caseload as it pertained to workload manageability and stress. I collected both the number of students on each teacher's caseload and the types of primary disabilities of their students. Teachers' daily schedules were used to determine the precise amount of time teachers had during their workday to collaborate with others, plan lessons with co-teachers, and complete paperwork. Caseloads, severity of student disabilities, and lack of time were all factors affecting stress and retention according to the literature (See Chapter 2).

Phase 2 data sources. In Phase 2, I collected data from teacher interviews, administrator interviews, teacher member check conversations, and researcher memos. I interviewed each case teacher once, and followed up with additional questions by email for clarification or additional information as needed. I interviewed each principal and district administrator once. After analyzing the data and drafting my findings, I conducted member check conversations with two of the four case teachers. The third teacher and the retired teacher declined due to time constraints.

Teacher interviews. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the teachers who were chosen as cases. During the interviews, I encouraged teachers to describe their work life in detail in their own words, to elaborate on the questionnaire with examples and stories, and to talk about both the extrinsic and intrinsic reasons they chose to stay in their schools. The interviews were my main resource to answer my research question about experienced teacher perspectives, and to discover the factors that influenced their decision to stay in their small schools. I had developed an open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix D), with some possible questions, and revised it as planned after analyzing the questionnaire responses

(see revised protocol, Appendix E). My open-ended questions were in the format, "How do you feel about . . .?" "Tell me about . . .." "Can you describe . . .?" Each initial interview lasted about an hour.

I audio-recorded the interviews for transcription, using two audio recorders in case one device gave out for any reason. I asked open-ended questions from the revised interview protocol and/or in response to participants' previously shared comments. After interview transcription, I followed up by email correspondence to fill in gaps or clarify statements.

Administrator interviews. I interviewed each district administrator and school principal once. I interviewed the Director of Student Support for the district, who is in charge of special education and all student services, and the district Coordinator of Special Education, who is specifically in charge of special education. Of the six PK-3 school principals, I interviewed only four because two declined the informed consent due to time constraints. I conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions, and encouraged administrators to describe how they were involved with the special education team and students in the district or in their particular school. I was interested in how their perception of the support they provided for special education teachers compared to the teachers' perceptions of the administrative support given. I met with each administrator at a mutually agreed upon location and time, and recorded the interview for transcription. The interview protocol (see Appendix G) consisted of seven questions, and usually lasted about half an hour.

Teacher member checks. After analyzing the data and writing up each case, I gave each teacher a draft of the description and findings, and then met at a mutually determined time and location. Two of the case teachers declined to participate in the member check due to time constraints. We reviewed the draft together and discussed the results and findings. This constituted

the main opportunity to share our understandings, and allowed each teacher to add to, further explain, or suggest revisions of her previous statements. We attempted to construct the most accurate and true version of each teacher's experience, as we perceived it. Differences of interpretation among the teachers, or between researcher and participant, were noted, and attempts were made to understand the differing viewpoints within the results and key findings.

Researcher memos. I took memos and created a running commentary throughout data collection and analysis detailing procedural notes, questions, and emerging hypotheses. I included my own reflections on the process and data as I collected it. I dated every entry and stated the occasion, such as "9/12/2016 - second interview with T1," or "10/15/2016 - reflection on district meeting." These notes created an audit trail and helped substantiate trustworthiness. They served as a way to record and check my thinking. An example of my memos follows:

> 9/7/2016, after district special ed meeting: Another SpEd teacher was in the room and mentioned a long term K-3 SpEd teacher who retired in 2014. She gave me his contact information. The discussion made me think about other ideas for potentially changing the direction of my research. I started to consider:
>
> - Include early childhood center? One experienced teacher there.
> - Include 4/5? One experienced teacher there.
> - At least two of the teachers currently in K-3 schools have five or more years of experience (L&V)
> - Include the retired teacher with more than 20 years of experience? (He worked under a principal who is now in the administration, so she might be available for interviews as well)
>
> Tonight I sent an email with the informed consent form attached.
> (Olson, Research Memos, 9/7/2016)

Procedures/Data Analysis

As stated in the Purpose of Study, my goal was to describe the perspectives of experienced special education teachers in small PK or K-3 schools and to explain the organizational and individual factors that influenced their decisions to stay in their schools. In keeping with my constructionist framework, in which the participants and I construct reality together (Gergen, 1985; Young & Collin, 2004), my analytical procedures were focused on interpreting all the data in a recursive fashion to help me answer those questions.

Phase 1 data analysis. The data collected in Phase 1 were intended to provide a more complete description of the factors affecting all the district PK-3 special education teachers' decisions to stay or leave the small school environment. I also used the data in an iterative approach to inform the interview questions in the next phase (See Appendix D and E).

Analysis of Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire. My unit of analysis for the questionnaire was the scores recorded by participants on the Likert scale items. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean and standard deviation of each item (Boone & Boone, 2012). The questionnaire consisted of 14 categories, with a variable number of items in each category (between 1 and 12 items). My analysis was based on the mean Likert-ratings and the standard deviations for each item, as seen in Appendix D. The statements were phrased such that Strongly Agree was always the stronger factor impacting the decision to stay (influencing retention), and Strongly Disagree was the weaker factor (influencing attrition). Because the purpose of my research was to examine retention of special education teachers in small schools, I analyzed the questionnaire in light of the factors that had the most positive influence on teachers' decisions to stay in their small school positions.

I examined the standard deviation results to determine where there was less agreement in teacher responses. I used those items with larger standard deviations to alter my interview protocol by developing additional questions to use in the interviews during Phase 2. The greatest standard deviation reflected the least agreement. Sixty-eight percent of the values lie within one standard deviation of the mean, so in this questionnaire, I considered any standard deviation higher than 1 to be high. The categories with high standard deviations (greater than 1) were: Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload, Stress Related to Job Design, Role Conflict, Opportunities for Growth and Advancement, and Adequacy of Materials and Space. I added or revised interview questions to the original protocol (Appendix D) to elicit more responses in order to examine the variability in these areas. The initial questions and corresponding new questions are listed in Table 5.

Analysis of PMRFs and documents. The PMRFs, caseload lists, and teacher schedules provided another source to determine the influence of district administration, caseload size, student disabilities, and time on teacher retention decisions. The documents triangulated my data sources as an extension of the other research methods, especially targeting the following categories that appeared in the questionnaire and/or in the literature review:

- PMRFs were used to determine the effect of the district special education meetings on teachers, and how the teachers perceived the meetings as a method of district support;
- Caseload lists were used to determine the number of students and the severity of the disabilities of the children served by each teacher, to support the comments about stress or workload related to caseload;

Table 5

Teacher Protocol Questions Changed or Added in Response to High SD on Questionnaire

Initial Question on Protocol	Revised/Added Question on New Protocol
Talk about how the central office administrators affect your work and your decision to stay.	Questionnaire responses about the support from the district administrator were varied. How do the following affect you in your job? • Frequency of feedback from the district special education administrator • How helpful the feedback from the DA is • the DA's ability to reduce the stress of your job
What kinds of things make your work stressful, or create stress for your colleagues?	Most respondents to the questionnaire feel stress related to their job, due to the severity of their students' needs, the range of needs and abilities, behavior and discipline problems, bureaucratic requirements and paperwork, lack of time, conflicting goals or directives. Talk about stress as it relates to your specific job and duties.
No specific question on initial protocol	There were a variety of answers about the manageability of the workload as a special educator in the district. How do you feel about the workload? What affects it most? (Size of caseload? Size of groups? Things you are expected to do? Severity of students' disabilities?)
No specific question on initial protocol	The questions about role conflict also had responses spread out from high to low. Talk about your experiences with role conflict regarding: • Time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers • The expectations of the district special education department and the principal's expectations • Teaching to the standards and meeting students' needs • The way lessons are taught in the general education classroom and what is effective with your students, and • Attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/behavioral needs
No specific question on initial protocol	Anything else you would like to say about your work?

- Special education teachers' schedules were used to determine how much time was available to plan lessons and collaborate with general education teachers and each other during the workday.

Phase 2 data analysis. The first stage of Phase 2 consisted of initial interviews with the four case teachers, including secondary follow-up questions. The second stage consisted of administrator interviews (principals and district special education administrators), and the third stage consisted of member check conversations with the case teachers. The data in Phase 2 were the most significant to answer my research questions. I wanted to know what factors, individual or organizational, influenced special education teachers in small schools to stay in their positions. Based on my social constructionist worldview, this had to be done through face-to-face interaction. While the questionnaire gave teachers the opportunity to describe their reasoning in a structured way, in conversation, I was able to delve into the teachers' and administrators' experience to understand and interpret their decisions within their personal contexts. I used two strategies to conduct my qualitative data analysis. The first strategy was to reduce the data through coding. As defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), coding is "the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (p. 3). The authors offered a way of studying social reality by offering guidelines on how to analyze qualitative data.

My coding system consisted of two stages. My analysis was a combination of *content coding* to search for words or phrases that align with or typify predefined categories (Ezzy, 2002), and the *constant comparative* analysis method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine themes that emerged from the data. For the initial content coding, the unit of analysis was words, sentences, or paragraphs in the interview transcripts. I searched for the *a priori* codes (Creswell, 2013) consisting of the 14 categories from the questionnaire, as well as any codes that emerged

from the data. Although I noted the frequency and number of words for each code, I did not merely count, but included each code no matter how rare, so I could include any possible contradictory information that may influence my findings.

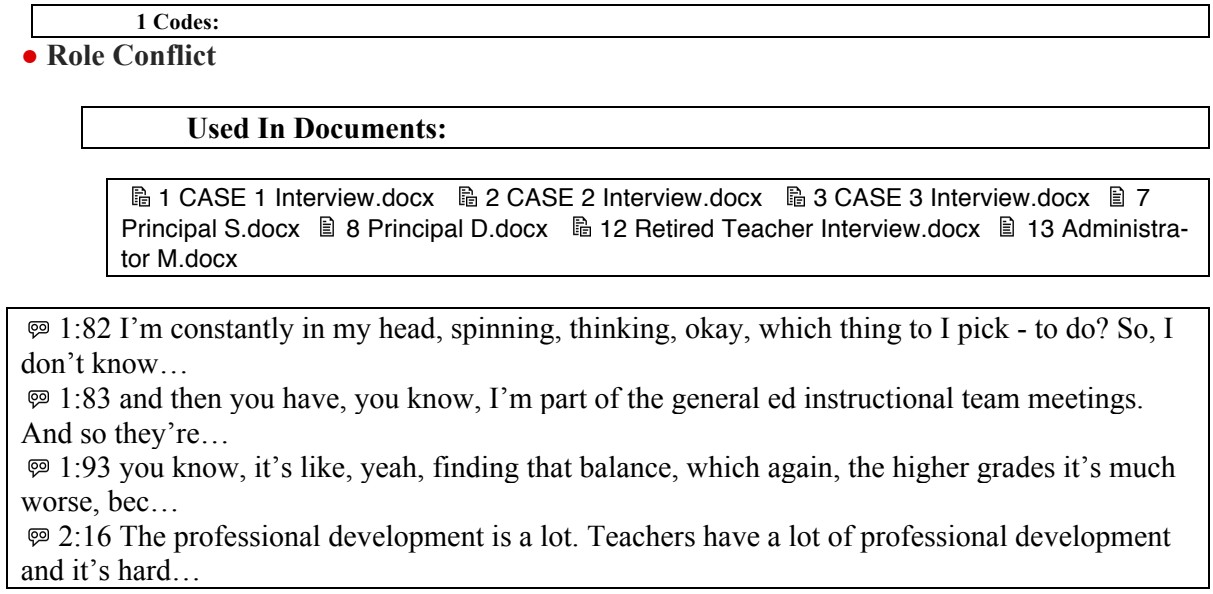
Following the content analysis based on the *a priori* codes, I conducted constant comparative analysis. Constant comparison assured that "all data [were] systematically compared to all other data in the data set" (O'Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008, p.41). I used constant comparison as an iterative process to reduce the data, as described by Charmaz (2014). First, I returned to the data and conducted open coding. The codes frequently overlapped with some of the *a priori* codes, but it was important to make sure I was not missing anything, so I noted when codes appeared multiple times. Then I conducted focused coding by looking for relationships between the codes in order to reduce the data into categories, which ultimately combined or reduced into themes.

In order to keep track of my codes and easily compare sets of interviews and other data, I used a computer assisted qualitative data analysis system (caqdas) called Atlas.ti. During the coding process, I used Atlas.ti to upload and store original transcripts. I was able to search for words and code and annotate whole sections of text. As I searched the data, I marked new codes that emerged, named them, and combined or divided them as I saw fit. I compared codes between the teacher transcripts, and grouped all the data for each case together to make comparisons both within and between cases. I was able to sort by code name and/or by document and click on the quotations to find the one I wanted in context. For example, a partial report from Atlas.ti data sorted for "Role Conflict" appears in Figure 1.

Analysis of interviews. I transcribed the interviews myself, as soon as possible after each interview. As suggested by Roulston (2010), I transcribed the words spoken, and used ellip-

ses for omitted words and square brackets for insertions if needed for clarity. I included all codes that emerged in any particular response, sometimes adding multiple codes for one quotation.

Figure 1. Atlas.ti Data Sample for Role Conflict



For long responses, I often attached a code to the whole response, but then added codes for subparts of the quotation to address all the data. Figure 2 shows an example of a partial transcription with coding. Codes sometimes overlapped and were included in more than one category. When it became clear that two codes were very closely related, I collapsed them into one. For example, the codes " Colleagues in Special Education" and "Other Teacher/General Education" were combined into the larger theme of "Collaboration." Many codes were grouped together into larger categories. I interpreted the interview transcripts through content coding and constant comparison, as described above. I kept a coding matrix on Atlas.ti as I continued my analysis. Figure 3 shows the Extrinsic/Organization page of an Excel matrix, which was a report downloaded from Alas.ti.

The other way I looked at interview data was by the number of words spoken about each topic (Table 10 in Chapter 4). In this study, counting was part of how I determined if a theme

was important. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) maintained, "When we identify a theme or a pattern, we're isolating something that (a) happens a number of times, and (b) consistently

Figure 2. Sample Transcription of a Teacher Interview with Coding

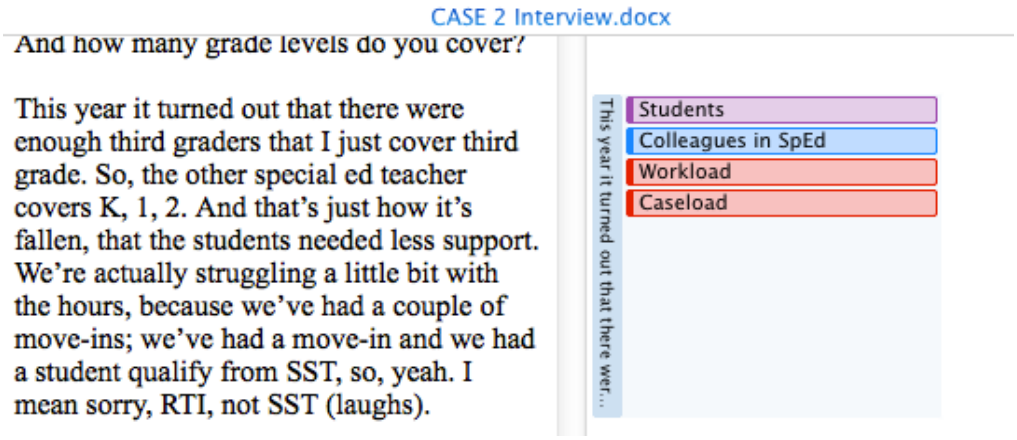


Figure 3. Atlas.ti Coding Matrix Sample of Extrinsic/Organizational Category

Color	Name	Groundedness	Modification Date
Red	Benefits	6	20-Dec-16
Red	Caseload	47	20-Dec-16
Red	Culture	1	30-Jan-17
Red	District Unique Quali-ties	23	7-Jan-17
Red	Materials	19	20-Dec-16
Red	Meetings	10	30-Jan-17
Red	Models (self-cont/incl)	1	30-Jan-17
Red	Paperwork	14	10-Dec-16
Red	Physical Demands	8	20-Dec-16
Red	Role Conflict	36	10-Dec-16
Red	School Size	50	21-Jan-17
Red	Space	9	20-Dec-16
Red	Stress	33	10-Dec-16
Red	Time	42	20-Dec-16
Red	Workload	46	20-Dec-16

happens in a specific way. The 'number of times' and 'consistency' judgments are based on counting" (p. 282). I counted the words and determined the percentage of each interview spent

on that category or theme, and used that information as part of my analysis. Results of this analysis are described in Chapter 4.

Analysis of member checks. The member checks supported trustworthiness by allowing the participant to review the findings and provide input. It allowed an opportunity for the interviewee to clarify previous comments, suggest revisions, or discuss implications with the researcher. Member checking was an important process within my social constructionist framework. My worldview involved the belief that reality was socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and that understanding was a process involving social interaction. The interviews provided that opportunity, but a final member check of the results and findings was central to constructing our understanding together.

As the participant and I spoke, we went through the drafted chapters together and I typed comments into the text or took notes to make sure I kept track of the discussion and the follow-up we considered in our conversation. I was careful to compare each member-check conversation with the interviews and other data sources from that case teacher, and included any parts that seemed to contradict the original interviews. If the teacher and I disagreed about a theme, both the teacher's perspective and my emic perspective were included in the results and key findings.

Methods for Verification of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness meant the findings must be credible, applicable in other contexts, and able to be repeated and confirmed. To ensure trustworthiness in my study, I triangulated (Creswell, 2014) my data in several ways. First, I used multiple methods to approach my study, including both quantitative and qualitative methods within a case study framework. Second, I used multiple data sources, including questionnaires, PMRFs, documents, teacher interviews with follow-up, and administrator interviews. Third, I

used member checking, meaning I took the interpreted drafts of each case back to the case teachers to discuss the findings and confirm the constructed story. Fourth, I reflected on and explained my biases and subjectivity and how they affected my interpretation of the data. Fifth, I included and discussed data and findings that seemed to contradict the rest. Sixth, I engaged a peer reviewer in a different field to read and review my study after creating an initial draft. Finally, I wrote memos as I undertook the research to create an audit trail (Merriam, 2009), because my study can only be considered valid (or trustworthy) if I can convince the readers how I arrived at my findings. The steps that I took to triangulate my data align with the standard belief about the necessary steps for supporting a qualitative research process and findings.

Data Management

All raw data were kept private to the extent required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Only the principal investigators, the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protection will have access to the information provided by the participants. A pseudonym was used on questionnaires, interview transcripts, and audio recordings. The information was stored on a password-protected computer, and hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet. Only de-identified data was retained after the completion of the study. Pseudonyms were used for any quotations from interviews or member checks. Audio recordings were secured in a locked file cabinet. Email correspondence regarding the study was sent from a password protected email address and messages were deleted after completion of the study. However, complete confidentiality of email correspondence could not be guaranteed. Participants were informed that they had the opportunity to decline the use of email correspondence at any time. Names and other descriptive information about participants will not appear in any published or presented version of this study.

4 RESULTS

My results follow the two phases of research. The data from Phase 1 informed Phase 2 in an iterative process as I conducted and analyzed the interviews. As stated earlier, my research questions were:

1. What are the perspectives of experienced special education teachers working in small PK or K-3 schools about the organizational and individual factors that affect their decision to continue teaching special education in a small school?
2. Which factors of employment are most important to special education teachers at all levels of experience in the small PK and K-3 schools to promote retention?
3. What are the principals' perceptions about which factors affect special education teacher retention in their small PK or K-3 school, and how do their views coincide with the teachers' perceptions of support?

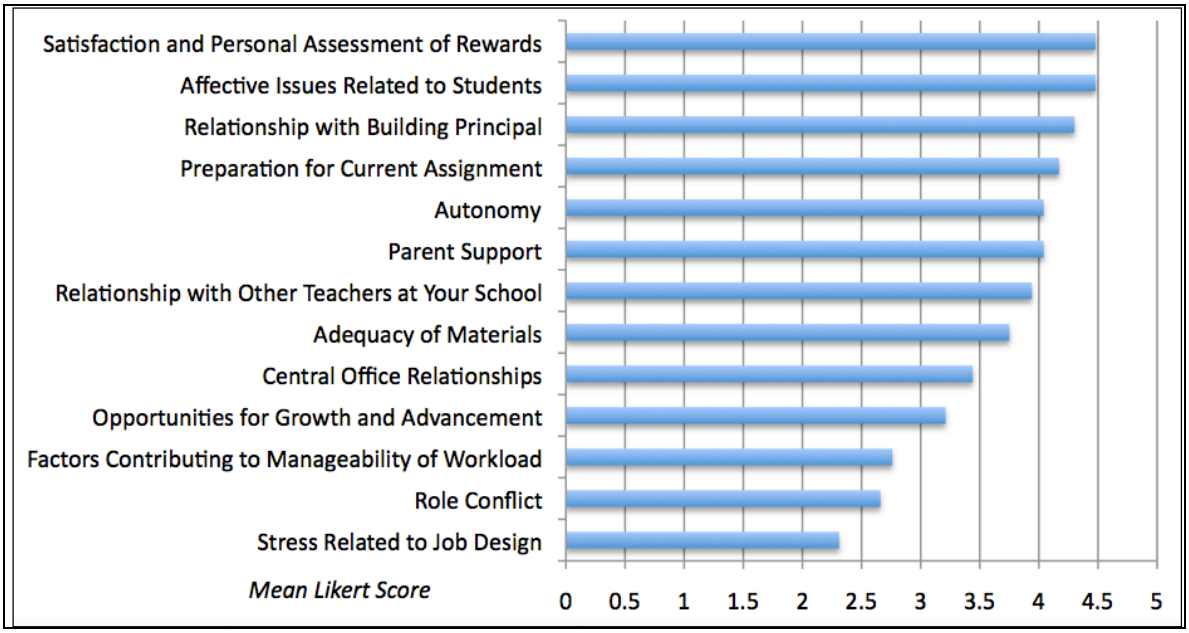
Phase 1 Results

Phase 1 data collection consisted of the Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire, the Post-Meeting Response Forms (PMRFs) collected after the district PK and K-3 special education teacher meetings, the caseload lists, and the teacher schedules.

Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire. I determined the mean and standard deviation for each of the 81 items and an overall mean for each category on the questionnaire (see Appendix A) by finding the average Likert rating based on the items in that category. The results are presented in Figure 4, in decreasing order from five (strongly agree) to one (strongly disagree). According to the results from the 16 teachers completing the questionnaire, the most significant categories (mean >3) affecting retention were Satisfaction and Personal As-

sessment of Rewards, Affective Issues Related to Students, and the Relationship with the Building Principal. The lowest categories (mean < 3,) were Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload, Role Conflict, and Stress Related to Job Design.

Figure 4. Mean Likert Ratings by Category of Support from the Questionnaire



The highest two categories, Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards and Affective Issues Related to Students, received Likert-rating averages of 4.48 and were both intrinsic factors. The third category, School Principal (mean 4.30), was extrinsic, and became an important theme in the interviews in Phase 2. Stress Related to Job Design (mean 2.31) received by far the lowest rating, meaning the factor most affecting attrition, and also emerged as a theme in Phase 2. Other low factors affecting attrition included Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload (mean 2.76) and Role Conflict (mean 2.66), which also emerged as themes in this study.

Another way I examined the results of the Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire was by disaggregating the results by years of experience, to determine if the teachers with

more experience in the district (five years or more) had significantly different perspectives on the various factors than the teachers with fewer years of experience (less than five). I determined the average Likert-rating in each category for each group. The results are listed in Table 6. For items where the averages were the furthest apart (over .5), the higher average is highlighted.

Table 6

Questionnaire Results By Years Of Experience (Likert-Rating Averages)

Questionnaire Categories	**Number of Items in Category**	**More Experienced (≥5 years) N=5**	**Less Experienced (<5 years) N=11**
Relationship with Building Principal	11	4.47	4.21
Central Office Relationships	7	3.34	3.48
Relationship with Other Teachers at Your School	7	4.26	3.96
Preparation for Current Assignment	12	4.40	4.07
Stress Related to Job Design	7	1.63	2.60
Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload	5	2.37	3.85
Affective Issues Related to Students	7	4.54	4.45
Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards	6	4.27	4.58
Role Conflict	5	1.60	2.67
Parent Support	3	4.07	4.03
Opportunities for Growth and Advancement	3	2.93	3.33
Autonomy	3	3.73	4.18
Adequacy of Space	1	4.00	3.27
Adequacy of Materials	2	4.30	3.68

The results for the two groups are very similar for many of the categories. Although the differences in opinion may not be statistically significant, it can be determined which categories have larger differences. Some have stronger influence on retention (averages closer to 5) and others have stronger influence on attrition (averages closer to 1). Table 6 indicates that the categories with low averages that had the greatest differences in perspectives were Stress, Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload, and Role Conflict. Both groups had low scores in these categories, indicating that they are themes related to attrition, but the more experienced teachers had the lowest. Other categories with higher averages were far apart, including Adequacy of Space and Adequacy of Materials. Both groups rated those categories above 3 ("neutral"), indicating that they may be positive categories leading to retention. The more experienced teachers' averages for Space and Materials was higher than the averages of the less experienced teachers. It is interesting to note that the higher scores for less experienced teachers are more negative – stress, workload, and role conflict, whereas the higher scores for more experienced teachers are more positive – adequate space and adequate materials. The largest differences were in Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload (difference in averages 1.48) and Role Conflict (difference in averages 1.07). The five categories with the highest differences will be discussed more in the themes that emerged in Phase 2.

Special Education Post-Meeting Response Forms (PMRFs). After each special education meeting called by the district Special Education Coordinator, participants present at the meeting completed a short reaction form (Appendix B). The form was intended to corroborate the questionnaire responses about district administrative support. During the data collection process, three meetings were held, one each in September, October, and November. The PMRFs were uniformly positive. The results of questions 1 and 2 are reported in Table 7. The results of

question 3 (What was discussed at today's meeting?) and question 4 (How will that impact your work?) are listed in Appendix C. Sample responses to questions 3 and 4 from teachers

Table 7

Responses to the PMRFs Questions 1 and 2

Meeting Date	Question 1: Participants circled if they had been in district <5 years or ≥ 5 years	Question 2: Participants chose responses (as many as applied)
9/26/2016	9 teachers < 5 years 2 teachers ≥ 5 years	Positive (fun, helpful, useful, important, other): 20 Negative (boring, waste of time, other): 0
10/19/2016	2 teachers < 5 years 2 teachers ≥ 5 years	Positive (fun, helpful, useful, important, other): 4 Negative (boring, waste of time, other): 0
11/14/2016	7 teachers < 5 years 3 teachers ≥ 5 years	Positive (fun, helpful, useful, important, other): 25 Negative(boring, waste of time, other): 0

with fewer than five years of experience included: 1) "Help me finish Individualized Education Plans," 2) "Expands my resource list," and 3) "Learned of helpful tools on SpEd drive [Special Education Handbook and information on Google Drive]". And from teachers with more than five years of experience, responses included:1) "All of this greatly impacts our work in the SpEd dept," 2) "Polish my inclusion of assistive technology in Individualized Education Program," and 3) "Transition information will be a huge help with sending third graders on [to 4/5 Academy]". All comments reflected actual topics discussed at the meeting (question 3) and how the topics discussed influenced their work. The positive results of the PMRFs did not, in fact, corroborate the results of the questionnaire. The questionnaire category called "Central Office Relationships"

had a relatively low mean (3.44) and a high standard deviation (over 1 for items about helpfulness and frequency of feedback from district administrators), indicating that teachers had disparate views on the effect of district administration on their retention decision. The interview protocol question regarding district administration was revised to delve deeper into this inconsistency, and the topic emerged as a theme that could affect either attrition or retention decisions (see Phase 2 Results).

Caseload lists. Caseload lists were examined in order to corroborate teachers' response to questions about caseload as it pertains to workload manageability and stress, both of which could contribute to retention or attrition decisions. The number of students on each caseload during the time of the study, as well as their grade levels and primary disabilities, are displayed in Table 8. The retired teacher and the teacher who had transferred to the position of instructional coach were not included, as they had no caseload at the time of the study. The table indicates that teachers in the district at the PK-3 level have between four and eleven students on their caseloads. The average number of students on each caseload is six, and towards the end of the year of the study, no caseload was over 11. State policy limits caseloads according to the students' disabilities. Teachers in self-contained classrooms cannot have more than 6-16 (depending on disability) with one or more paraprofessional(s), and resource/inclusion teachers can have no more than 26 unless the students are deaf-blind, deaf/hard of hearing, or visually impaired (External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of Education, 160-4-7-.14 Personnel, Facilities And Caseloads, Code: IDDF (14), 2007). Caseload size is one of the issues addressed on the questionnaire in the category Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload (with a Likert-rating mean of 2.76), which indicates that, as far as the 16 teachers completing the questionnaire were concerned, caseload size is a factor that may lead to attrition. However, the results of the

caseload list indicated that caseload sizes in the district are well below state limits, and case teachers maintained they were small compared to their former schools. Although the caseload list

Table 8

Number of Students and Disability Types on Participant Teachers' Caseloads

Teacher Name or #	Number on Caseload	Grade Level(s)	Disability Types
Lindsey	9	PK	SDD, AUT, SLI ½ self contained, ½ inclusion*
Naomi	5	3	MOID, SLD, AUT inclusion
Rebecca	7	1, 2	OHI, SDD, SLD, AUT inclusion
Teacher 4	11	K, 1, 2, 3	OHI, SDD, AUT, MOID
Teacher 5	7	1, 3	SLD, SDD, OHI
Teacher 6 (Researcher)	4	1	AUT, OHI Inclusion
Teacher 7	8	2, 3	SDD, OHI, SLD
Teacher 8	6	K, 1	SDD, AUT
Teacher 9	6	1, 2	SDD, PID, AUT
Teacher 10	6	1, 2	OHI, SDD, SLD, EBD
Teacher 11	6	2	AUT, OHI, SDD, MID
Teacher 12	5	K, 1	OHI, SDD, AUT
Teacher 13	5	3	EBD, SLD, AUT, OHI
Teacher 14	5	3	SLD, AUT, OHI

Key: SLD specific learning disability, AUT autism, OHI Otherwise Health Impaired, SDD Significantly Developmentally Delayed, EBD Emotional/Behavioral Disorder, PI Profound Intellectual Disability, MID Mild Intellectual Disability, SLI Speech or Language Impairment, MOID Moderate Intellectual Disability

* service model listed when known (case teachers and researcher)

on Table 8 did not corroborate the findings of the questionnaire, caseload size emerged as a positive theme from the perspective of the three currently working case teachers in the study.

Teacher schedules. Twelve teachers' schedules were examined to corroborate or contradict teachers' responses to questions about time during their workday to collaborate with peers, plan lessons with co-teachers, and complete paperwork. The time available for teachers without student responsibilities (instruction or other interactions) not including a 30-minute lunch break is displayed in Table 9. The retired teacher and the teacher who had transferred to the instructional coach position were not included, as they were not working in special education at the time of the study, and two of the special education teachers failed to submit schedules. The workday for all teachers was officially eight hours. The workday for five of the PK or K-3 schools in the district was from 7:30-3:30, and one was from 7:45-3:45. School started for students at 8:00 a.m., and dismissal was at 2:30 p.m. All teachers were expected to have time in the mornings before students arrived and in the afternoon after the students left to plan during working hours, but general education schedules disseminated at the beginning of each school year (which I know from my emic perspective) indicated that most general education teachers were scheduled for at least an hour of planning and/or collaboration time during the school day while students were in their special area classes (music, physical education, art, and Spanish). When possible, special education teachers were also included in the grade level collaboration, which was the case for Rebecca, Teacher #4, and Teacher #11 (Table 9). For many of the teachers who covered two or more grade levels, it was not possible to meet during the set collaboration times for both grades, sometimes not even for one grade level, because they were working with students from the other grade level during teacher collaboration times.

As seen on Table 9, special education teachers had an average of 36 minutes without student responsibilities during the school day. This time is listed as "planning" on most schedules,

Table 9

Time in Daily Schedule not Devoted to Student Interactions

Teacher Number	Planning Time (Minutes Per Day During Student School Hours)	Comments about Schedules
Lindsey	30 minutes 2x/week	No duty-free lunch; 30 min. 2x/week only if no meeting is scheduled
Naomi	0-60 minutes	Duty-free lunch, 1x/week no planning, 1x/week 30 min., 2x/week 60 minutes with grade level team.
Rebecca	60 minutes	Duty-free lunch, daily 60 minute planning
Teacher #4	60 minutes	Duty-free lunch
Teacher #5	0-20 minutes	Duty-free lunch, 3 times per week 20 minute planning
Teacher #6	0-30 minutes	Duty-free lunch; 30 minutes 4x/week, no time one day
Teacher #7	0 minutes	No planning and no duty-free lunch
Teacher #8	0 minutes	2x 15 minute breaks for lunch. No planning
Teacher #9	0-30 minutes	Duty-free lunch; 30 min. 3x/week; no planning 2x/week
Teacher #10	0-40 minutes	Duty-free lunch; one day 40 min, 3 days 15 min, one day no planning
Teacher #11	60 minutes	Duty-free lunch, 60 min. 4x/week
Teacher #12	0-15 minutes	Duty-free lunch; 3 days no planning, 2 days 15 min.
Teacher#13		Did not submit schedule
Teacher#14		Did not submit schedule
Mean (Average of the 12 submitted)		0-36 minutes

which can be used for planning and preparing lessons, but also can be used for collaborating with general education colleagues to plan upcoming lessons. Some special education teachers supervised students even during lunch and special area classes despite the fact that the State Department of Education required that local boards of education allow teachers in K-5 to take a 30 consecutive minute duty-free lunch period (Justia US Law, O.C.G.A. 20-2-218, 2015). The schedule information listed on Table 9 corroborated the responses on the questionnaire regarding Stress Related to Job Design. The items pertaining to schedule (such as, "stress related to having time to fulfill all my obligations at work; stress related to bureaucratic requirements, rules, regulations, or paperwork") each had a mean rating of 1.08, indicating they were negative factors that could affect attrition, and averaged over 1 standard deviation, indicating a high degree of disparity in teacher opinions.

Phase 2 Results

Phase 2 consisted of four initial case teacher interviews with follow-up questions via email, two district administrator interviews, four principal interviews, and two case teacher member check interviews. Two of the case teachers declined the member check due to time constraints.

Based on my analysis, 30 initial codes emerged from the interview data. As stated in Chapter 3, I also counted words in each code (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013) as one way of analyzing the importance of each theme. It seemed to me, from my emic perspective as a fellow special education teacher, the amount of time spent talking about particular themes was one indication of how important that theme was to each teacher, but the actual words they used are an even stronger indicator.

Table 10 shows an overview of the 30 initial codes by number of words spoken by each teacher as well as the percentage of each interview spent on that topic. Computing the percentage

Table 10

Case Teacher Quotations by Number of Words and Percent of Interview for Each Code*

Number of Words for Each Interview:		**Lindsey 5781**	**Naomi 5094**	**Rebecca 5156**	**Ryan 6977**
Code	**Category**	**Lindsey #/%**	**Naomi #/%**	**Rebecca #/%**	**Ryan #/%**
EXTRINSIC/ORGANIZATIONAL					
Role Conflict	Extrinsic/Org	490/8%	1428/28%	350/7%	467/7%
School Size	Extrinsic/Org	708/12%	166/3%	726/14%	187/3%
Caseload	Extrinsic/Org	227/4%	440/9%	855/17%	847/12%
Unique Qualities of District	Extrinsic/Org	74/1%	599/12%	436/8%	0
Materials	Extrinsic/Org	40/<1%	518/10%	409/8%	290/4%
Physical Demands	Extrinsic/Org	144/2%	235/5%	65/1%	0
Paperwork	Extrinsic/Org	35/<1%	85/2%	308/6%	101/1%
Benefits	Extrinsic/Org	55/1%	139/3%	24/<1%	0
Space	Extrinsic/Org	78/1%	50/1%	418/8%	254/4%
Stress	Extrinsic/Org	934/16%	440/9%	605/12%	1140/16%
Time	Extrinsic/Org	1203/21%	1435/28%	424/8%	100/1%
Workload	Extrinsic/Org	1874/32%	1128/22%	794/15%	752/11%
INTRINSIC/PERSONAL					
Future Plans	Intrinsic/ Personal	160/3%	141/3%	881/17%	0
Growth/ Advancement	Intrinsic/ Personal	90/2%	123/2%	453/9%	120/2%
Motivation	Intrinsic/ Personal	68/1%	114/2%	409/8%	195/3%
Autonomy	Intrinsic/ Personal	0	28/1%	185/4%	0
Personal Rewards	Intrinsic/ Personal	0	14/<1%	494/10%	166/2%
Students	Intrinsic/ Personal	551/10%	328/6%	881/17%	65/1%

Code	Category	Lindsey #/%	Naomi #/%	Rebecca #/%	Ryan #/%
TOTAL ADMINISTRATION					
District Admin.	Administration	568/10%	329/6%	1263/24 %	529/8%
School Principal	Administration	407/7%	420/8%	233/5%	1187/17%
Instructional Coach	Administration	94/2%	76/1%	0	52/<1%
COLLABORATION					
Gen Ed Teachers	Collaboration	603/10%	227/4%	979/19%	625/9%
Colleagues in Special Education	Collaboration	374/6%	165/3%	926/18%	188/3%
Parents	Collaboration	265/5%	170/3%	80/2%	547/8%
EXPERIENCE/EDUCATION					
Education	Exper/Educ	35/<1	19/<1%	373/7%	172/2%
District Exper.	Exper/Educ	89/2%	169/3%	55/1%	529/8%
Exper./SpEd	Exper/Educ	23/<1	206/4%	19/<1%	206/3%
ATTRITION					
Behavior	Attrition	154/3%	116/2%	608/12%	441/6%
Other Attrition	Attrition	214/4%	228/4%	176/3%	272/4%
RETENTION					
General Retention	Retention	293/5%	106/2%	86/2%	218/3%

**Percents for each teacher will be more than 100 due to overlapping codes.*

of each interview spent on each topic revealed the intensity of interest in certain topics. The highest percentages were the most revealing.

For example, Naomi spent 28% of her interview talking about Role Conflict, whereas the other two teachers each spoke about role conflict 7-8% of the time. Rebecca spent 24% of her interview speaking about District Administration, whereas Naomi and Lindsey spent 6% and 10% respectively on that topic. The percentages of time speaking about workload were all quite high – 32%, 22%, and 15%, indicating that that topic might be more significant than others. However, as noted above, counting does not tell the whole story. For example, it is interesting to note that Benefits had low percentages (1%, 3%, <1%), yet the content of what was said in the interviews revealed that Benefits had a significant influence on retention. In this case, the variance in the number of words spoken and the relative importance of the theme is easy to explain. The courtesy tuition benefit is not a complex issue; it does not take long to explain it or dissect its influence, yet the benefit can be very significant to teachers. Ryan's interview had the most words, but many of them did not fit in the codes scheme. For example, he had no comments on benefits, unique qualities of the district, physical demands, future plans, or autonomy, but he had a great deal to say about principals and stress.

I grouped the codes that were related into thematic categories. Through the reduction process, three overarching themes emerged, each with several sub-themes. Major themes included Positive Themes Affecting Retention (with eight sub-themes), Themes Affecting Either Retention or Attrition (with four sub-themes), and Negative Themes Affecting Attrition (with eight sub-themes). Table 11 lists the themes by those that, from the teachers' perspective, affected their own retention, those that may affect either retention or attrition, and those that, from their perspective, may cause attrition of teachers in the district. The order of the themes on Table 11 was determined somewhat subjectively; by using all the data sources to determine what I felt were the most important within each category. They were also ordered by putting related themes

together for ease of transitions (caseload size is related to school size; district administration is related to professional learning, Stress is related to scheduling, workload, paperwork, and time, etcetera).

In order to answer my research questions, both extrinsic and intrinsic themes are included. As experienced special education teachers in small schools, Lindsey, Naomi, Rebecca, and Ryan each had particular experiences and perspectives about their work related to the extrinsic (organizational) situation at their schools and their own intrinsic motivations. The extrinsic/organizational category included all aspects of the job related to the organization, in this case, the school system or the particular school. These aspects were generally outside of the teachers' control, and could strongly influence retention decisions. The intrinsic/personal category included the aspects that influenced teachers based on their own personal attributes and characteristics that affected their retention at the school. Following Table 11, a coding tree (Figure 5) displays in graphic form how the themes are related or overlap. For example, school size and caseload size are related, in that smaller schools have fewer students in all, so there are fewer students with disabilities to assign to each teacher. Intrinsic motivation is related to collaboration with colleagues, and, although courtesy tuition is an extrinsic/organizational benefit, it may influence intrinsic motivation since it affects a teacher's family decisions about school for his or her own children. For the negative themes, many of the factors cause stress, so the themes of workload, scheduling, paperwork, time, physical demands, role conflict, and stress all overlap. The mixed themes have a symbol indicating they can go either direction, as a factor causing retention or a factor causing attrition. Many of these relationships will be clarified in the explication of the results by theme.

Positive themes affecting retention. I chose to discuss positive themes first, as they represent the factors that strongly influence retention, which is the focus of the study. As displayed in Table 11, the eight positive themes affecting increased retention according to the case teachers in the small schools included benefits/courtesy tuition, principals, caseload size, school size, collaboration, intrinsic rewards/motivation, Experience/Education, and materials. Results from the data sources combine to illustrate each theme.

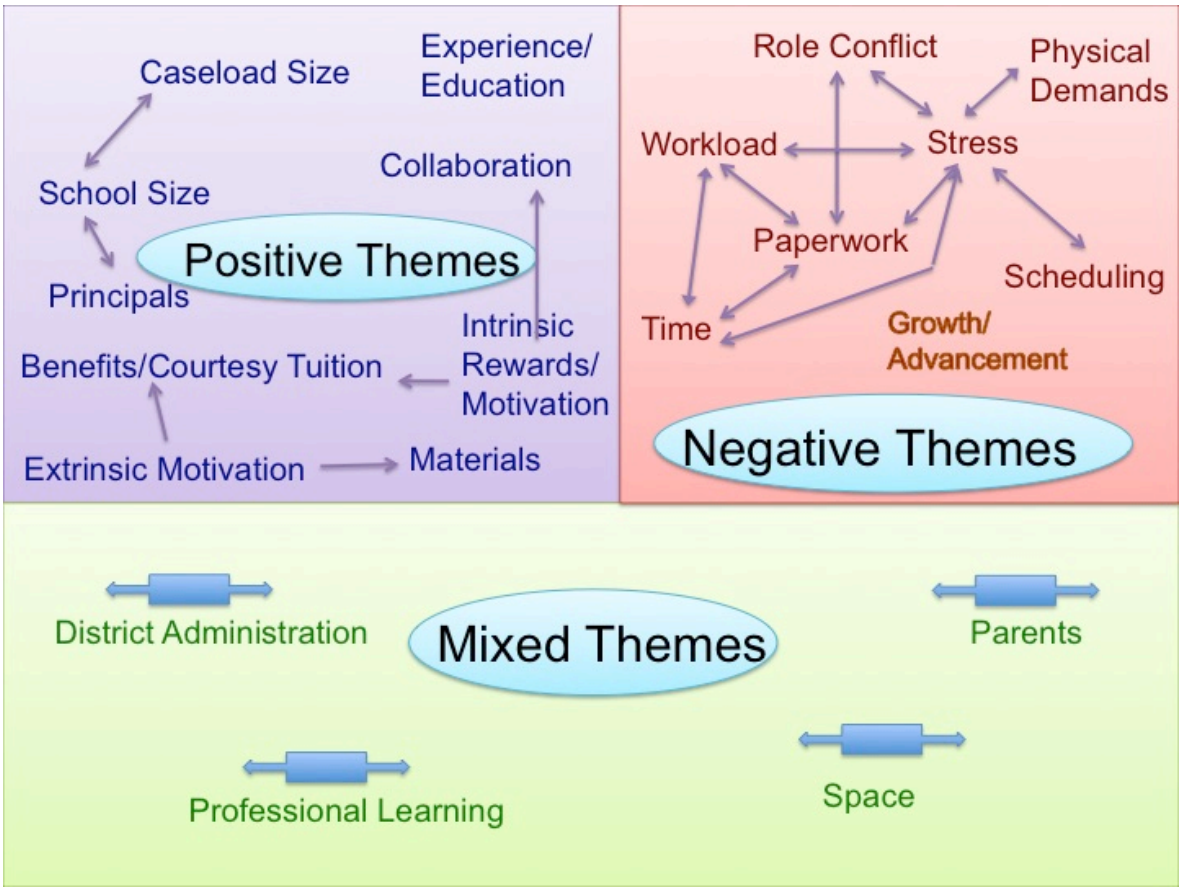
Benefits/Courtesy tuition. The term "courtesy tuition" used in the district had become a bit of a misnomer by the time of the study. The schools are public, so there is no tuition. In the past, when the small district schools had been under enrolled, the district allowed out-of-area

Table 11

Themes Affecting Retention and Attrition in Small Schools as Reported by Participants

Positive Themes Affecting Retention	**Themes Affecting Either Retention or Attrition**	**Negative Themes Affecting Attrition**
Benefits/Courtesy Tuition	District Administration	Role Conflict
Principals	Professional Learning	Physical Demands
Caseload Size	Parents	Growth/Advancement
School Size	Space	Stress
Collaboration		Time
Intrinsic Rewards/Motivation		Scheduling
Experience/Education		Workload
Materials		Paperwork

Figure 5. Coding Tree Showing Relationships Between Themes



students to enroll for a fee (tuition). However, students who were children of staff members were allowed to attend for free, hence "courtesy tuition." Since the schools had grown, the out-of-district tuition program had been discontinued, but staff children who lived out of district could still attend, and the term courtesy tuition continued to be used. The courtesy tuition benefit was the main reason named for retention of two of the four case teachers, and therefore appeared to be an important motivator for retention. Because of that, Lindsey and Naomi had not considered leaving the district at least until their children graduated from high school. Although they spent less than 3% of their interviews talking about this theme, their opinions were made clear in their

choice of words. Talking about future plans, Lindsey stated, "I don't want to leave [the district] until my daughter's finished" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). Naomi also commented,

> The reason that I have stayed in [the district] honestly is for the courtesy tuition. I came here because I wanted my son in [this district] and the school system has provided a quality education and many opportunities for him that are not available in other systems. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

From their perspectives, some of the negative aspects were offset by the ability to get a good education for their children without having to move into a high-tax school district or pay private school tuition. The retired teacher did not mention courtesy tuition. It may be that his family did not need it, or perhaps that benefit was not offered when he could have used it. Principals and district administrators were also beneficiaries of the Courtesy Tuition policy, but none of them mentioned it as a possible retention factor for teachers or themselves. From my emic perspective, however, I knew of one administrator in the study who lived out of district and had children in the district schools. However, it may have played a role in other administrators' retention decisions, and in the retention of special education teachers with fewer years of experience. This benefit is unusual, and a unique quality of this particular small district, so it was not mentioned in the questionnaire and I did not find it mentioned in the literature.

Principals. The school principals were the on-site coordinators and administrators of the special education teachers and students in their schools. The teachers each spent 5-8% of their interviews talking about their principals, and had positive things to say. For example, Lindsey confided,

> We do have it pretty good. I mean as far as support from . . . my principal. She's extremely supportive. She comes to every IEP meeting. If I have a question, her

> door is always open . . . She's just very supportive. She encourages us to go out and try new things. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

This attitude was reflected in the other interviews as well. About her principal, Naomi said, She really attends to the details. She attends every IEP meeting, she calls parents . . . She tries to get personnel, if personnel are needed, by shuffling things in the building, or asking for new hires when we need that" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). Rebecca had a similar view, adding, "He knows services inside and out, he knows the law inside and out, so he is extremely supportive of us, and he doesn't demand to oversee everything that we do. He's watchful, but not micro-managing, and very supportive" (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016). The perspective of the teachers in these small schools reflects the small school literature, that there is more principal contact with teachers due to school size, and this may be a benefit for special education teachers in small schools.

Ryan, the retired teacher, spent 17% of his interview talking about principals. He had worked under many different principals in several of the district schools, with a lot of principal transitions, even midyear. At one school he had three different principals in succession, at another school no principal was available, so the school had to share a principal with another school until Thanksgiving. After that, he said, "the principal [after] that was not a very good principal, and they've had several not very good principals" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016). Given his history, the currently working case teachers' perception of principal support had improved a great deal since then.

The principals themselves perceived their own support of special education teachers and students to be strong as well. As stated by the teachers, principals took their responsibilities for special education seriously and felt they fulfilled them well. Principals reported that they at-

tended IEP meetings in their schools and fulfilled their role as Local Education Agency (LEA) representatives, who authorized the funding and programming for special education services in the school. Gary stated, "I attend every eligibility and every IEP" (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016), and all three other principals mentioned attending IEP meetings and serving as LEA as well, as reflected in the teachers' comments. Principals also said they were involved in deciding which students would be placed in which classes with which general education and special education teachers. For example, Dana stated,

> [I] match people's expertise with the right set of students . . . everybody's got their thing that they like to do, and people are happy when they're working in the areas that they want to work in. Not to say we don't push them into some things, but, you know, there have been some mismatches that I've known from around the district, and they left, because it just didn't fit, and so I think attending to that is really important. (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016)

She related the importance of making good decisions about student-teacher assignments as a retention factor. In addition to matching teachers and students according to their expertise, principals strove to maintain personal relationships with their special education staff. Principal Dana commented,

> It really has always come down to the interpersonal relationships, you know, do they feel valued, do they feel that they're supported in doing a good job, that we look at them as respected professionals. (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016)

This type of personal relationship may be similar to what the teachers refer to as "very supportive," as mentioned by both Lindsey and Rebecca above. Lindsey's principal Sarah talked about her daily support as part of the special education team as well. She said,

> We just always are doing check-ins, you know, what are your needs, any thoughts for scheduling, problem-solving, you know, we may have a particular child and we really come together as a team and talk about it and problem solve and come up with ideas and suggestions. (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016)

Rachel, my own principal at the time of the study, revealed my emic perspective by referring to "you guys." This serves as a reminder that I was studying perspectives from "inside" the system, and my emic perspective was a part of this study. She spoke about trying to make sure special education teachers feel supported, and said,

> By knowing you and your kids and trying to see where I can fill in gaps for you . . . Special ed teachers need to feel like you're supported and that, you know, I'm the front line and, you guys aren't . . . it is something that I think is important, to make sure that you guys know that you are supported. (Rachel Interview, 11/1/2016)

She explained her reference to "the front line" as her responsibility to stand by us as a buffer for difficult issues, such as parents who are upset or legal issues. Principals also let teachers know that they were valued, and the case teachers appreciated that, as seen in their comments about the principals above. Dana exclaimed,

> I can't sing their praises enough. They have taught me SO much. And, you know just, they've taught me a lot about, number one just working with a variety of kids that I can use with anybody . . . I cannot thank this crew enough. I've just learned tremendous amount from them. (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016)

Similarly, Rachel said,

> You guys are HARD workers . . . I would love for all of our teachers to understand the amount of work that goes in to data collection, and IEP writing, and the legal aspects of your job that I don't think the general education teachers really understand. (Rachel Interview, 11/1/2016)

Whereas Dana and Rachel praised the work of the special education teachers directly, Gary seems to attribute the success of the special education program at his school mostly to himself. He said,

> I've had really good success with special ed here. I really have. It was the thing that scared me the most becoming a principal. I felt like I cannot believe I'm going to be responsible for this potential mess of conflict and stuff, and so, it literally kept me up at nights. And it's become the thing I'm like most proud of at my school. (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016)

All three teachers were enthusiastic about how the principals related to their students in special education as well. For example, Naomi said of her principal,

> She makes it her business to know every student, to know their needs, and, when there are problems, whether they be behavioral or academic or whatever - she knows the students well enough that she is able to support issues with the logistics of the day-to-day needs of doing the job. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Lindsey also felt support from her principal for the same reason. She said her principal, "knows all the kids' names; she knows their parents names" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). Rachel, my principal, mentioned similar ways she supported students. She considered supporting the students with special needs an important role as principal. She stated, "[I] help the students meet their goals throughout the school day - carpool, lunch, the hallway, drop-off in the morning"

(Rachel Interview, 11/1/2016). In my emic perspective, no principal at my former larger school would engage with my students nearly that often.

Principals also felt responsible to help special education teachers with student behavior problems. Principal Gary said,

> If there's ever behavioral issues, I get in and help with those, you know, I don't really want my instructional coach dealing with any kind of behavioral issues in special ed, so I'll go in and kind of help with those kind of things . . . if kids need a time out, if kids need another place, it's not always like if you come in to the principal's office, or the principal is being called to you, it's not always a bad thing, it's hey, you need a break, and you need time, let's take a walk. So I'll provide that kind of support too. (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016)

Principal Dana also claimed student behavior as an important part of her special education support. She said, "my role is to at once provide the support both with the special ed teacher and the general ed teacher . . . with behavioral situations" (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016).

The data from the interviews revealed a high level of agreement between teachers and their principals. However, it was interesting to note that the District Director of Student Support, Maureen, did not feel that principals necessarily had the skill set to provide the in-depth support needed. She stated,

> The work is so complex, and I think a lot of people don't have a deep, deep understanding of what special ed is. The principals may not really know what good instruction is supposed to look like, particularly in self-contained classes, so folks are not going to get enough of those 'that a boy's' that they really need. (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

Most of the principals admitted that they had very little coursework in special education. Gary had taken two special education law classes. Sarah had years of experience in Response to Intervention, which is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs, and could be a pathway to eligibility for special education with parent consent ("Response to Intervention" 2013-2017). She also had experience in the Child Find program, which is a legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to special education services. Child Find covers every child from birth through age 21. The school must evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability (Lee, 2014-2017). Dana had worked with special education in a performance-based module during educational specialist degree work; and Rachel had required coursework in special education during leadership training. Besides supporting students and attending IEP meetings, principals evaluated all teachers using the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) by performing formative five-minute walk-through observations and longer 30-minute observations, and considered themselves as the foremost go-between for parental issues, and the first person to talk to about other special education needs – such as materials, professional development, schedule assistance, and behavioral issues.

When asked about attrition, most of the principals were not aware that there was an attrition problem in the PK and K-3 schools in the district. Statements included: "I'll be honest with you, I didn't know we had that problem at all" (Gary Interview, (11/29/2016), "I have not experienced that . . . I don't have so much, I don't feel like here I have so much turnover" (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016). Principal Rachel's school had only been open for three years, so she had not felt a problem, although one of her special education teachers transferred to a general education class after one year. Dana suggested that there might be more attrition in the higher grades –

especially middle and high school. Maureen, the District Director of Student Supports, confirmed that there were greater retention levels among the special education teachers in the K-3 schools.

Despite the positive reports about principals from current teachers, it is interesting to note that the negative themes that emerged from the questionnaire (Figure 4) were areas that could potentially be influenced by a principal. The lowest three categories were Manageability of Workload, Role Conflict, and Stress. According to previous literature (Billingsley, 2010; Brownell, 2002), principals can play pivotal roles in making sure workloads are manageable, decreasing role conflict, and ameliorating stress. It is unclear if the case teachers did not realize this connection, or if they found the emotional and relational aspects of principal support more important. The principals themselves often emphasized personal relationships, making an effort to get to know the students, and showing the teachers they were valued, as evidenced in their quotations above.

Caseload Size. From the questionnaire, the category "Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload" included statements such as 1) The total number of students I work with each week does not affect my workload, (mean Likert-rating 3.08) and 2) The size of the group of students I work with during a given block of time does not affect my workload (mean 3.25). Although the Likert-rating averages were in the neutral range, these items had standard deviations above 1, which indicated a high level of variability in teacher responses. However, all three of the currently working case teachers appreciated the size of their caseloads. The data from the caseload documents collected at the time of the study (Table 8) indicated caseload sizes anywhere from a low of four to a high of eleven students. In follow-up correspondence, this did not always remain the case. For example, at the time of her interview, Lindsey had six students on

her caseload. She spoke about caseload issues 4% of her interview time. From a later list, Lindsey's caseload had risen to nine students. She said, "Yes I now have 9. I had two move in and one added to my caseload after going through RTI. I would say I typically get 2 new students a year - sometimes more. Our caseloads always grow" (Email Follow-Up Correspondence re: Caseload, 4/5/17). Despite having one of the higher caseloads in the county by the end of the year (only one was higher, with 11), Lindsey commented, "I feel like in this district especially our caseloads are really low" (Lindsey Interview, 11/2/2016). In her interview, Lindsey mentioned that she had had to temporarily manage 14 students during a colleague's absence. However, she worked closely with a paraprofessional, who was able to cover some of the IEP services. Later, in her member check, Lindsey was surprised at the wide range of caseload sizes in the small schools in the district, and wondered why one teacher had 11 students on her caseload, which Lindsey found extremely high (Lindsey Member Check, 4/18/2017). Rebecca spoke about caseload issues 17% of the time in her initial interview. At that point, she had five students on her official caseload, but had to cover IEPs and behavioral support for students whose teacher was on leave. Several months later, although a new teacher was hired, Rebecca's own caseload rose to ten students. She commented, "We have kids in RTI most of the year and at the end of the year my caseload explodes!" (Rebecca Member Check, 5/8/17). She appreciated that, especially in relation to other systems where she had worked, the caseloads were relatively small. She said, "We are able to have smaller numbers of students. So, whereas in [a previous county], I had up to 15 students, here it seems to be 10 or less" (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/16). Naomi had five students all in one grade level, and spoke about caseload about 9% of the time. Although students had become eligible for special education in other grades, her third-grade caseload had remained steady.

Principals generally also considered caseloads a retention factor. Principal Gary mentioned that the caseloads in the district were manageable, but Rachel commented that, as far as caseload goes, she understood that it is not just numbers that are important. She stated,

> We don't have a ton of students to serve, it is really hard, one, we have some students who are very needy, and I don't necessarily mean that they have a lot of needs in their IEP, they just might be needy kids. (Rachel Interview, 11/1/2016)

Her point stressed the importance of considering student needs when assigning caseloads, not just the number of students. I found this important as well from my emic perspective. During the year of the study, I had the smallest caseload in the district, but students with intense behavioral and academic needs to serve within the inclusion environment and some resource room time.

Lindsey's comment about her caseload growth was reflected in the interview with her principal, Sarah. As the principal of the school serving three-year-olds through pre-kindergarten, she mentioned, "one of the challenges that we work with is because of the age group, you know, you [can] get a big kick, you can have more children" (Sarah Interview, 12/14/16). Her comment reflected my assumption as part of my problem statement that teachers serving PK-3rd grade students often have new students to accommodate during the year as young students become eligible at a much higher rate than in later school years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This assumption is true of schools of any size, but for small school teachers adding students more often involves collaborating with another general education teacher and finding time to provide services in an already tight schedule, because they are often serving more than one grade level. Richard, the District Coordinator of Special Education, also mentioned caseload size as a positive factor, which coincided with the teachers' perspectives. He stated,

> I think we tend to have smaller caseloads. I think that's one advantage. We don't put as much money into administration so we put it into teachers. So our caseloads . . . Last year they averaged about 8, and I think that's a nice low [number] compared to other districts. (Richard Interview, 10/19/2016)

The District Director of Support Services was also trying to minimize the effect of caseloads. Her idea was,

> One of the things I've tried to do as a director is really think about who the kids are, and balance it not only by numbers, but also by hours of service. If you have 20 kids and they only need a half an hour each, that's actually less work than having four kids who need 30 hours each. And so really looking at it in that way I think has helped create teaching positions that are set up to help teachers do the good work that they need to do. (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

Like Rachel, she believed more focus on student needs was an important consideration in creating equitable caseloads. The fact that district administration and principals were combining their efforts to control caseload size and manageability made caseload size a strong retention factor for special education teachers in the small schools.

To gain an historical perspective, Ryan, the retired teacher, maintained that caseloads used to be much worse. He commented, "[There] might have been like 18 kids. Some of them didn't have a lot of service, but they still all had to have IEPs, they all had to have at least someone put their eyes on them everyday" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016). In another instance, he had been assigned 14 students with emotional-behavioral disorders in a self-contained class, " it was kind of insane, with one para and it was completely crazy" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016). The dis-

trict had made changes that made caseload for special education teachers, something that may be easier to accomplish in small schools than in large.

School size. In addition to caseload sizes, the teachers had positive things to say about working in small schools in general. Although school size was not included on the questionnaire, it emerged as a theme in the interviews. Rebecca spoke about school size 14% of her interview. When asked what the difference was between her former large school and her current small school, Rebecca said, "I like the smaller setting; I like that we're trying to do it right. And that we're small enough to build on what we're doing, so I really like the community feel and the smallness and that's why I'm here" (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016). Rebecca loved the schools but had mixed feelings about whether or not the system could continue to grow without ruining what they had. She said her Master's Degree in Leadership helped her look at things from an organizational perspective as well as from a teacher perspective, so she had some real concerns about the small system growing too rapidly. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the school system had grown 87.6 % since 2009. At the time of the study, the board and administrators were looking for sites to build new schools. Rebecca commented,

> I think we do a really good job here. I do fear we're going to grow so fast, and be so stuck in our ways, that we don't feel like we need to change, and we actually do. And I'm hoping that we're open-minded enough to say, "You know what, the way we're going isn't working for most of the people or the kids, so let's think like a bigger system. How do they do it? What works? What doesn't work?" I do feel like we have a really great school system. I'm very proud to be a part of it. But we have to be aware of the growth. I don't want us to be way up here on the mountain and then crumble . . . I'm afraid it's going to crumble from the weight,

> and I don't want that to happen. That's my only concern. But I really love the smaller school system. I enjoy it. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Lindsey spoke about school size about 12% of her interview. She made a direct comparison between her former large school and her current small one, and clearly preferred the smaller school size. She maintained,

> When I taught in a big school, and both times I had self-contained classrooms, I was just pretty much back in the corner, and no one really knew what I did. I mean we were included for things, but I feel like everyone knows one another [here] and there's more teamwork and you're not just part of your grade level team, everybody knows each other. I feel like there's much more camaraderie in a smaller school. And my principal knows every kid and their name, and their parents' names. You know what I mean? I mean that's very different. I had a principal in [my old school]; I had a little girl in a wheelchair, and she was going on a field trip and we didn't have a para to go with her, and the little girl said, "Oh, I really want to go," and the principal looked at me and said, "She can talk?" And I was like, "Yeah she can talk" (laughs). But it's very sad. She didn't know the kids really at all. But I think part of that again is the size. We had a large school. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

For her, the small school allowed closer relationships with colleagues and administrators, and she felt everyone was working together for the students.

Naomi rarely mentioned school size specifically (3% of interview), but she felt there were some specific opportunities that came up because of the system's small size. She said,

> I feel like, even though we're a small system, there are positions that come up within the system for a special ed teacher, like additional coordinator positions. They added the IEP lead teacher positions, there are committees and things that one can serve on if you were interested in that, and opportunities for attending training. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

From my emic perspective, I am aware that the "IEP lead teacher positions" were created the year before the study when the district transitioned to a new online IEP system. One teacher from each school was sent for training, and they were then supposed to teach the IEP system to their school's special education team, and help troubleshoot as issues arose. Those teachers got a small annual stipend. School and/or district level committees were volunteer opportunities without remuneration. Her comments overlap with the "growth/advancement" theme, which will be discussed in the Negative Themes section. For her, the small schools offered enough opportunities for her to engage in, even if unpaid, but she felt she could be included in the workings of the school.

Maureen, the District Director, had a similar perspective to Lindsey about the advantages of small schools and recognized the effect on teacher retention. She felt it was an advantage that people knew each other's talents better, and that teachers feel more valued when they can share their skills. She commented,

> With our smaller schools, like our K-3 schools, our retention is a little bit better. And I think part of it is because there's a very tight community. You have a staff of less than 25 people, people know each other; they love each other; they don't want to leave each other." (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

Maureen also thought teachers in the small schools may enjoy the variety of the caseloads from year to year. She said,

> In larger schools, people can, so it's a plus and a minus, people specialize, but I think when people specialize, they don't get as much different kinds of stimulation, so whereas, if you're in a small school, you really are the jack of all trades; you are going to do whatever comes. (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

Maureen refers to the varying caseloads as a "plus and a minus," but the teachers did not mention this aspect as either a retention or an attrition factor. It is possible that some teachers enjoy the variety from year to year, yet other teachers may prefer to specialize and build on their skills in a particular area from year to year, which may not be possible in a small school where a smaller number of students must be divided between a small number of teachers.

Richard, the District Director of Special Education, had concerns similar to Rebecca's about the small size of the schools because of growth. He said very little has changed about how they structure the district administration in special education, despite the fact that, in the last 10 years, the district has grown from about 200 to 500 special education students. Although in Maureen's interview, she said there were 58 special education teachers and 30 paraprofessionals, Richard said there were 70 teachers, 25 paraprofessionals, seven speech pathologists, two occupational therapists, a physical therapist, and occasional other staff. He said, "I'm feeling very stressed trying to cover all those things" (Interview, 10/19/2016). From his view, the best thing about the small school size is the small caseloads for teachers.

Principals also had a variety of comments about school size and how that impacted special education teachers and their own role as the primary administrators for the special education departments in their schools. Dana mentioned,

> I think that is an important part of being a small school, an important issue in being a small school in a small school district, is you're not flush with personnel at all, and so helping them navigate through the tensions, the conflicts, the everyday needs, that's one of my big roles, is to be that kind of big liaison. (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016)

Lindsey's principal, Sarah, made a similar comment about small schools and the benefits for young children, "I think the support that you're able to provide teachers in a small setting like this, and everything is, everything here is gauged to that age group" (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016). My principal, Rachel, however, saw some advantages and disadvantages in school size as far as the students were concerned. She explained,

> I think it's really hard when you work in a small school, and there are only two of you [inclusion teachers], and so you have to cross grade levels . . . I think when you are a special ed teacher in a big school, it is much easier to cluster students across a grade level. Here we have one group, and if we have one group, then they have been together the entire time since they started school. And I can break them up, but I only have three classrooms [at each grade level]. So, I think that in a larger school you have more opportunities for the special ed students to mix it up some and get to know some other students instead of always being with that same cohort of kids. But also, in my experience in big schools, special ed teachers don't really get to know the general ed population that well, because they're either pull-

> ing out or doing resource a lot for their special ed kids. Because we have a really heavy concentration on the inclusion model, I think that you guys really get to know all the kids in this school, and all the kids know who you are. You're another teacher in the classroom; you're not just the teacher for these kids. So, that's an advantage but also a disadvantage. (Rachel Interview, 11/1/2016)

So for her the small school was advantageous for inclusion special education teachers not just because of small caseloads, but because they could work with all the students in the general education classroom and know all the students in the school. But the students in special education usually ended up clustered in the same general education class year after year, and therefore possibly did not meet as many different peers as they would if they could be split up into different classes.

Across the district the teachers, district administrators, and principals found mostly positive aspects to the small school environment. Although there were some concerns about growth, and about clustering students, the perspective of the teachers at the time of the study was very positive, and they considered the small school setting a retention factor.

Collaboration. The theme of collaboration encompassed working together with both special education and general education colleagues. According to the results of the questionnaire in Phase 1, the 16 teachers in the district indicated that the category "Relationship With Other Teachers At Your School" was 7th in importance of the 14 categories (Likert-rating mean of 4). The average responses about collaboration ("Relationship with Other Teachers at Your School") for each group of teachers on the Questionnaire were similar (Table 6). The case teachers had positive things to say about their colleagues in special education and their general education co-teachers. There was a large variability in how much they spoke about other teachers. Lindsey

spoke about colleagues 16% of the time, Naomi 7% of the time, and Rebecca 37% of the time. The special education teachers appreciated the general education teachers' willingness to collaborate and to do what was best for the children. Students in self-contained classrooms were assigned a general education class to participate in to the degree they were able. They often combined the groups for some of the special area classes (art, music, Spanish, and Physical Education) and got together for the Expeditionary Learning activities and EL culminating Celebration of Learning events whenever possible. Lindsey, who served students in both the self-contained and the inclusion model, said, "the teacher I am currently working with is very open to new ideas, she's open to suggestions and she also takes on our kids. It's not like 'these are your kids' they are OUR kids, and that's fabulous" (Interview, 11/3/2016). Naomi was also enthusiastic, saying,

> It's such a good working relationship both with my special ed team and the general ed teachers in this school. They are just really inclusive . . . the teacher that I work with very much sees all the students as her students, and she always considers their needs when she's planning activities for the classroom, and we meet together to plan. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Rebecca recalled one instance of a teacher several years before who had been unwilling to collaborate, but other than that, she was also highly satisfied with the collaboration with general education teachers. Her comment was,

> All the teachers were willing to do what it takes to help all the kids, so, if they had a question about differentiating or something they come to us, or about behaviors, they come – even if the kids are not on our roles – so I find that they're very open and willing to work together. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Lindsey's former colleague had left the school in the summer, but she commented several times about their good relationship, and she had especially appreciated the way they had divided up the work between them. She said, "L. and I used to split it, but this year it's just me (laughs). So maybe in January I will have a new teacher on board" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). During her member check conversation, she said a new colleague had been hired and they also had a good working relationship.

Despite the positive comments and appreciation for each other's skills and support, it is important to note, as seen in Table 9, that the special education teachers reportedly did not have much time for direct collaboration with each other because of schedules, especially lack of planning time. This issue will be discussed more thoroughly in the Negative Themes. However, the case teachers considered collaboration with coworkers in the small schools a retention factor.

Intrinsic rewards/motivation. Intrinsic Rewards or motivation refers to the aspects of the job that influence teachers based on their own personal attributes and characteristics that affect their retention at the school. Rebecca spoke about this theme the most (38% of the time in the initial interview), whereas Naomi spoke about it 6% of the time, and Lindsey about 4% of the time. But all four case teachers mentioned personal reasons for becoming special education teachers in the first place based on experiences when they were young. When asked how she decided to become a special educator, Lindsey said she did an internship at a school where there were many children with special needs. She said,

> There was one little girl in particular and I wish I could remember her name, that just intrigued me, she was kind of like a puzzle, trying to figure her out, like how she thought and how we could get her to follow directions, learn classroom routines, and how to communicate her needs. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

Rebecca had a brother with special needs, and commented,

> I just saw how he had to go to special classes every day . . . and all the stuff he had to deal with, and I kind of got to know what was included in the special ed umbrella, I guess you would say, and thought, okay, that's what I want to do. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Naomi, who was close to retirement, had been offered a volunteer position at a camp for children with special needs when she was 13, and said, "I just loved it and have done it ever since. As a matter of fact I volunteered that summer and then I continued in the fall and just started volunteering year round" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016).

The teachers' intrinsic motivation was reflected in their plans for the future as well. None of them wanted to leave the field completely. Lindsey expressed her ongoing interest in working with her students, which made her want to remain at her job. She commented,

> I like the age group I'm working with. I don't want to have to commute [drive so far] . . . I like the puzzle. I like the figuring-things-out. And what can we change here, and what can we do here to make this work. I think that's my thing." (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

However, she still felt there was something else for her in the future before she retired. She said, "I need to figure out what my dream is. I know I want to stay sort of in this field and I haven't found what I want to do next" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). Rebecca also had intrinsic motivation to stay with her work in the small school. She said,

> I want to end my career [here], because I believe in what we're doing. And I like the smaller setting; I like that we're trying to do it right. And that we're small enough to build on what we're doing, so I really like the community feel and the

> smallness of this and that's why I'm here and not there; because it would be just as easy to drive up a mile in the other direction to [another district]. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

However, for her future, Rebecca dreamed of "a half time position and then a tutoring business working with small groups tutoring social skills, and I'm Orton-Gillingham trained, so I can do reading groups and stuff like that, so that I could make my own schedule" (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016). She too planned to leave after her child graduated from high school, although she lived in the district so was not reliant on courtesy tuition.

Naomi's intrinsic motivation was still strong. She said, "this is my 33rd year, and I still love teaching" (11/17/2016). However, she planned to retire at the end of the year. She stated, "My son is graduating high school and so I'm going to retire so I can draw my teacher retirement, but I do plan to still teach in a part-time position" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). Ryan, the retired teacher, also had had intrinsic motivation to stay a long time. He said, "I liked the kids . . . some kids I would have for two or three years, that's nice having continuity with them" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016).

Rebecca was also intrinsically motivated by the autonomy she was given to try new things. She described a grant she applied for to try something new with alternative seating and equipment to create a new atmosphere in her room. This gave her new inspiration to collect data on the effect the changes had on the children's work output and focus. Rebecca is also the one who mentioned wanting the opportunity to learn from other special education teachers and to share her skills, which shows a high degree of intrinsic motivation.

From Lindsey's perspective, teachers not only had intrinsic reasons to begin in special education and to continue, but they also may have had intrinsic reasons to leave their jobs. She stated,

> We lost two people last year, one because she had three kids under six, and she just couldn't do it anymore (laughs), and actually they moved out of the area and bought a smaller house so she could stay home. And then the other one, he just needed a break. And he wanted to do something different . . . I mean, those are the only direct ones I know. The other ones I know left because they wanted to do something different . . . it could possibly be the workload and the stress level, so I don't know. I think it's pretty individualized, I don't think there's a general "This is why they leave." (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

In some cases, however, it was hard for Lindsey to say whether the reasons were intrinsic or extrinsic. She admitted that someone who "wants to do something different" may well have extrinsic reasons that he does not want to discuss. People who leave for family reasons or moving out of town can be assumed to be leaving for personal reasons, but others may use personal reasons to hide their dissatisfaction with organizational factors.

Experience and education. All four of the teachers felt well prepared for their jobs by their education and experience. They all had higher degrees in the field (master's or specialist) and between six and 26 years of experience each before starting in the district (see Table 2). They were confident about their skills and abilities to help students with special needs achieve their goals. Rebecca, for example, mentioned, "I feel like I get better every year," and, more specifically, maintained, "I have a really good track record with behavior disorders." Principals were also well aware of the skills of their experienced special education teachers. Principal Gary

said of Naomi, who had transferred out of his school to a different school in the district the year before, "She's one of the most amazing people and one of the most amazing teachers I've ever met. And I learned so much about teaching from her" (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016). As noted in Table 1, every teacher in the study had previous experience as well. It is an advantage for this district that they are able to attract such well-educated and experienced special education teachers, and their experience and skills may have encouraged their retention.

Materials. The availability of materials and technology for teaching was another retention factor for the special education teachers in these small schools. The case teachers all attested to having more than adequate materials at their disposal. When speaking about Sarah, her principal, Lindsey commented, "If we need materials, she'll try to get them for us" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/16), later adding, "We have lots of stuff. I'm a hoarder (laughs), and also I've been there a long time so I have like a closet full of stuff." Similarly, Rebecca said of her principal, "She makes sure that if materials are needed for students or the classroom, that we get those" (Rebecca Interview, 11/17/16). Naomi was also satisfied with the materials. When talking about her teaching day, she mentioned several assistive technology she had available, such as "Snap and Read," a product that allows students to adjust the reading level of a text without changing the meaning, and word-prediction software to accommodate students with writing difficulties. She taught them to use Google products (Google Drive, and Google Classroom and Google Slides) to produce research papers on student laptops or iPads. Her one complaint as far as materials was that, "the leveling software does not go low enough, so pulling articles and using leveling software is not enough for those students. And so that's one area that we could use some help with, is low-vocabulary, high-interest books" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/16). Rebecca also had ample

materials, and was able to write a grant to the city's education support foundation for special items. She said,

> I just applied for money for bean-bag chairs and slant boards and balls to sit on and light covers that kind of dim the lights a little bit . . . So my entire classroom is alternative seating, we have no tables [except] a computer table and chairs . . . we sit on bean bag chairs or there are other, disks, the little disk that they sit on, a little soft disk, or um, the ball chairs to do the work with slant boards." (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/16)

This project also encouraged her autonomy and her motivation to teach in a different way, and therefore may have been a factor in her retention decision.

Principals perceived it as their responsibility to make sure the special education teachers had materials. Some comments included, "making sure they have everything they need" (Gary Interview, 11/29/16), "out of my general fund we provide materials, money to get the materials that they need" (Sarah Interview, 12/14/16), and "of course materials, you know, what kind of materials are needed, or wanted, because that can vary from teacher to teacher" (Rachel Interview, 11/29/2016). Richard, the Coordinator of Special Education, provided materials and technology in his role as Assistive Technology Coordinator. He said,

> I think we have really good technology in our system, and resources in general. So, if teachers need some things they can get things ordered and we'll pay for them. Technology especially, having one-to-one iPads from fourth grade through 8th, and looking at Chrome Books in the future, I mean that makes our job in the system a little easier because the technology is already out there. So maybe [I]

> just [need to add] apps to an iPad for a fourth grader, rather than buying the whole iPad. (Richard Interview, 10/19/16)

From the historical perspective, the level of technology and materials had improved. Ryan, the retired case teacher, commented,

> We actually get materials now. It used to be that basically you sort of just got what was left over, or they'd give you a little bit of money when they first started, when the state first started doing the Hope Scholarship and use it for technology. We never got the computers. (Ryan Interview (12/6/16)

The case teachers and administrators felt the access to materials was a retention factor. The amount of technology and materials available in the district may also be a result of the affluence of the city. The Parent Teacher Association held annual fundraisers for specific goals, often related to technology for the schools.

However, when comparing the responses of the more experienced teachers to the less experienced teachers on the Likert-scale Questionnaire of Special Education Teacher Support (Table 6), teachers newer to the district were not as satisfied with the materials. The average rating of the less experienced teachers (3.68) was between 3 (neutral) and 4 (agree), indicating much less enthusiasm than the more experienced teachers, who had an average rating of 4.30, which was between 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). It is possible that teachers newer to the district were not yet aware of the various procedures for requesting materials, or that the more experienced teachers had collected their materials over several years as they discovered sources (principal, district, grants) for accessing materials.

Themes affecting either retention or attrition. Some of the themes that the teachers spoke of often had both positive and negative attributes affecting retention decisions. Those included District Administration, Professional Learning, Parents, and Space.

District administration. One theme that emerged and was talked about quite often was the effect of district administrators on the teachers' experience at work. From the teachers' perspective, the relationship with district administrators could lead either toward retention or attrition. Lindsey talked about district administration 10% of the time in her interview, Naomi 6%, and Rebecca 24%. The PMRFs were also intended to reflect the attitude of teachers toward district administration support by way of the monthly meetings held by the Coordinator of Special Education, Richard. Although the PMRF's were anonymous, teachers were asked to indicate if they had been in the district 5 of more years or fewer than five years. The three case teachers were the only teachers with five or more years of experience completing the forms, since Ryan was retired and the teacher who transferred to administration did not attend those meetings. The responses on those forms indicated that the three case teachers that attended felt that Richard shared very important information at the Special Education meetings. Comments included, "All of this greatly impacts our work in the SpEd dept," (PMRF, 9/26/16), "This will highly impact my work with 2nd and 3rd graders (PMRF, 10/19/16), and "Transition info will be a huge help with sending 3rd graders on" (PMRF, 11/14/2016) (see complete comments in Appendix C). In personal interviews as well, the case teachers felt Richard was concerned and helpful when they had parental or student issues. However, they felt both Maureen and Richard had very little time to come to their schools and really see what they were doing or get to know their students. Lindsey maintained,

> Well we never see Maureen. Richard is very supportive, you know, we have monthly meetings with him. I feel like he's responsive, that you can email him. I mean I know he gets like 3000 email a day, but I feel like he does get back to you, and he'll say, "I'm looking into it." I think he's struggling. I think that's a two-person job. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

As far as direct district support for her and her special education colleagues was concerned, she added,

> I do feel like we're sometimes the forgotten children . . . I think [Richard] is just putting out fires. He's going to IEP meetings, talking to parents that are upset . . . I think that's what he's doing and he can't necessarily support us as teachers because he's busy doing that. Which is probably the case with [Maureen] as well. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

She felt the coordinator had too many responsibilities and that more support at the district level would be helpful. In a member check conversation, Lindsey said she hoped the changes planned for the following years, such as restructuring central office staff and building new schools, would help that problem (Lindsey Member Check, 4/18/17). Naomi had a different attitude about district support. She felt she had enough support from her principal, and did not really expect or require feedback from the district. Her comment was, "I don't really feel like that affects me very much. I guess I don't expect a lot of feedback, and unless something is wrong and needs to be corrected, I'm fine with not getting a lot of feedback" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). Rebecca, however, felt that, although she got occasional encouragement from the district administrators, she did not get much feedback. She understood their time constraints, but would have appreci-

ated it if they could come by schools to watch her teach and get to know her kids. She compared it to her former school, and said,

> I think it's because in the bigger systems . . . every school had a lead teacher [in special education], so you could have an immediate concern answered without having to wait to go through somebody at the district office. Somebody would be there to answer any kind of question that you might have. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Rebecca felt like Richard and Maureen had lots of ideas, but without knowing the children, sometimes the ideas just did not fit. She felt their feedback would be better if they knew the kids. In a member check conversation, Lindsey corroborated Rebecca's statement, and added, "We never see them. It would be beneficial if they could see the kids in the schools more" (Lindsey Member Check, 12/1/2016). Rebecca said she knew two teachers who told her they had left the system partly due to lack of communication between the district and the special education teachers. She commented,

> What they said to me is that the communication from the district to the teachers is lacking . . . the communication's not going both ways, [and] then there are mix-ups. And genuinely I think, innocent, because there is no middleman at the school who doesn't have a caseload of their own and is just there as the lead teacher. I think that's where the communication stops. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Rebecca believed the rapid growth of the district would soon require that sort of position to improve communication between the district and the special education teachers. She thought one lead teacher without a caseload could provide really good support for up to nine or ten special education teachers, even if they were at different schools in the district. During a member check

conversation, Lindsey agreed with the lead teacher concept. She said, “in my former district, the lead teacher even did assessments which had to be done annually before each IEP review; we just needed to enter it into the IEP” (Lindsey Member Check, 4/18/2017).

Dana, one of the principals, also perceived some dissatisfaction with district administration. She stated, “In some places I’ve seen some tension between the [school] special ed department and the central office special ed department. There is mixed messages and that’s very frustrating for some people” (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016).

Maureen, the District Director of Student Support, had many ideas about how she planned to improve special education teacher retention. She felt that special education needed a full-time director at the district level,

> Currently, and that happens in a lot of small districts, I have about nine different hats or programs I’m responsible for. And special ed really needs a full time director. That might be another way to create more opportunity for me to be able to actually get out to the schools and meet with teachers and meet with kids.
>
> (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

She felt new teachers needed more “nuts and bolts” training right away to help them feel they had the tools to do their jobs. She also wanted to create more resources to help teachers work out problems with students with behavior problems, such as providing supply teachers who would be hired to substitute as needed to give teachers some time to complete behavior analyses and to observe other teachers who have really good skills with different types of students. Maureen had been working on convincing the district to offer specific benefits for special education teachers, such as signing bonuses, paid paperwork and collaboration days, regular professional learning specifically for special educators, coaching, mentoring from seasoned teachers who have retired,

and supply teachers with special education training hired full-time to fill in when teachers were absent or were doing professional development, but she had not yet persuaded the district to implement her suggestions.

As the case teachers attested, Richard, the district Special Education Coordinator, had a lot of responsibility. He described an impressive array of duties, including providing professional learning opportunities (at least monthly) and going to IEP meetings specifically when, "teachers want extra help brainstorming solutions for students that have been difficult" (Richard Interview, 10/19/2016). Other duties he considered vital to his job included school visits, student observation and feedback, troubleshooting and training on new IEP software, complete responsibility for Assistive Technology (He mentioned that, at the time of the study, at least 63 students had assistive devices), coordinating transition meetings for students who are moving from school to school, purchasing equipment and arranging the funds to pay for it, and responding to emails from teachers, principals, and parents. He claimed to be responsible for approximately 70 special education teachers and 25 paraprofessionals serving students with special needs in the district. Richard commented,

> [Maureen] can spend probably a fourth of her time on special ed, then I'm the only full time coordinator of special ed after that . . . we don't have any teachers that are given time to be lead teachers with a lower case load or anything. (Richard Interview, 10/19/2016)

District administrators were aware of how many teachers were leaving and why. According to Maureen, the District Director of Student Support Services, there were three major reason special education teachers had left the system the year before: personal life changes, including retirement, transferring to a general education position, or moving into an administrative posi-

tion. Of the 16 special education teachers (out of about 60 total) who left their jobs the year before (PK-12th), eight had a life change (retired, moved, stayed home with children), three stayed in the district but moved into general education, two moved into administrative positions, one had been teaching under alternate certification and failed to get full certification, one left because of stress, and one left because of philosophical differences with the district, but continued in special education elsewhere. Maureen had not conducted formal exit interviews, but had had an informal conversation with each person who was planning to leave.

When asked why she thought people transferred into general education, Maureen said, "Special ed is really hard. I think, particularly as we are becoming more affluent, our parents are becoming more demanding; there's that litigious element that people really don't like" (Interview, 12/15/2016). That "litigious element" was a concern because Special education was based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was created in 1990 as an amendment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act from 1975. So all the documents related to IDEA that must be completed by special education teachers are legal documents – the IEP, the eligibility forms, and the progress reports. They all have strict timelines which must be adhered to, such as the evaluation must be completed within 60 days of receiving the parent's consent to evaluate, the initial IEP must be completed within 30 days of the determination of eligibility, progress reports must be sent at least every 90 days, etcetera. The legal aspects of the job came up several times in various contexts. Richard, the Special Education Coordinator, mentioned it as an aside when he was wrapping up his interview. He stated,

> I've gotten a lot of bad emails, but we always seem to work it out when we get to face-to-face, . . . we don't have any lawsuits currently, we don't have any parents that are pursuing any legal action against us. (Richard Interview, 10/19/16)

The legal aspects of the job were also mentioned in other themes, especially Parents and Paperwork.

Richard, the district Special Education Coordinator, corroborated the teachers' perspective that some special education teachers may have chosen to transfer to general education because they felt they do not have enough onsite district administrator support from professional special educators, that parents could be demanding and even litigious, and that there were too many meetings during and after school hours. He felt teachers also become frustrated with the slow growth made by some students, or that they did not have time to fulfill each student's needs. He felt scheduling was also very frustrating for teachers, and commented,

> Your schedule can only fit so much, and that makes it hard . . . especially for our K-3 teachers . . . trying to balance your special ed time when you can't take them out of music or PE or art and you don't want them to miss reading, and what's left? K-3 teachers especially spend hours coming up with their schedule only to have it changed the next week when a new student comes in or someone new is identified, and that's a struggle I think. (Richard Interview, 10/19/2016)

Richard also commented on the idea of Lead Teachers for Special Education, the suggestion put forth by Rebecca. When asked what he perceived as difficult for special education teachers in the district, he said, "I know in some systems there are lead special ed teachers at each school that don't have a caseload, so that person can really support you if you need it . . . we don't have that here" (Richard Interview, 10/19/16). He implied that he thought it might be a good idea, but did not go on to say why the district did not create such a position.

The overall regard the teachers had for the district administrators was evident. However, the frustration with the amount of time district administrators had to engage with them and come

to the schools was also clear. The theme of district administration was therefore mixed as far as attrition and retention. Some teachers were encouraged to stay, and some considered leaving the small school environment. This mixture of opinions about district administration was also evident in the following related theme of professional learning, since administrators were largely responsible for creating or providing PL opportunities.

Professional Learning (PL). Professional Learning was another theme that could encourage either retention or attrition. The building principals felt responsible for arranging (PL) opportunities for their special education staff. Gary said, "along with the instructional coach [I] really provide professional learning" (11/29/2016). Dana said, "it's really important that I provide professional development in general studies whether it's, you know English, language arts, math, science or social studies, but also in different delivery methods for special education students" (11/29/2016).

Sarah, Lindsey's principal for PK, mentioned, "We do lots of professional learning. I have an instructional coach and that's his full focus . . . Every month there is PL that's being conducted by the instructional coach, and the special ed teachers attend all" (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016). Later she explained in more detail, and related the PL to the small school size that enabled a more personal approach. She commented,

> Professional learning is just huge here. That's all our coach does. He actually goes into the rooms and does observations and then will model in the classroom, so he will teach and let the teachers [observe], and then we do peer-to-peer observations, set up a peer to go observe another peer and then they debrief . . . Sometimes hearing something from a peer and seeing it from a peer is much more valu-

> able than hearing it from an administrator or hearing it from your coach even, so we use that in close proximity. (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016)

This type of personal PL with observation and modeling was mentioned in previous literature as something that was missing for special education teachers (Brunsting, et al., 2014; Sedivy-Benton & Boden McGill, 2012), yet in this district the amount of PL was not always appreciated, and special educators felt it took too much time away from their instruction with the children.

Although the principal's claimed responsibility for the PL of special education staff, the district Special Education Coordinator, Richard, considered providing PL one of his primary responsibilities as well. He commented, "I provide training on a regular basis, we have monthly trainings. I try to meet with all the teachers of the schools to do those trainings on different topics related to IEPs and best practices" (10/19/2016). According to the PMRFs, the teachers appreciated the information they received from Richard because it was directly related to their job responsibilities.

Other training required by the district was not always appreciated. Special education teachers were expected to attend every PL activity that the general education teachers attended, in addition to the district special education trainings. During her interview, Naomi spent 28% of her time on the topic of PL and the ensuing role conflict. She maintained,

> The professional development is a lot. Teachers have a lot of professional development and it's hard to implement new learning with little time for preparation. Much of the professional development that we attend may not be appropriate for special education. Learning strategies and good instruction for special education oftentimes looks very different than good instruction for general ed students. And one thing that I think is a big philosophy in [the district] is discovery, and students

> abstracting their own content from activities that are presented. Which is a great way to facilitate higher-order thinking with students who are typical. Students who have special needs don't learn well that way. And so, when we have a lot of professional development where that is the focus, it's not always applicable to us. (Naomi Interview, 11/7/2016)

Lindsey also felt that some of the time spent in PL for Expeditionary Learning could be better used for training targeted to the needs of teaching students receiving special education services. Expeditionary Learning is a cross-curricular educational model that positions all members of the school community as learners, intentionally focusing on creating and sustaining community. Students use PK-3 curriculum standards to guide their learning experiences and expeditions, crafting meaningful and authentic products. Whereas the special education teachers appreciated the learning opportunities targeted for them with the Coordinator of Special Education, they were frustrated with the time spent in hours of professional learning that they felt was extraneous to their work, and required them to go to training during the school day while the students were served by a substitute.

As seen in the comments above, the district heavily emphasized Professional Learning. Some teachers appreciated the experience as professional growth and as a way to learn more about how the schools function, while others felt it was a distraction and not necessary for their work. For some teachers, the many hours of PL may encourage them to look elsewhere for work, while others felt it enriched their work and led to retention.

Parents. Another factor influencing either retention or attrition is the relationships to the parents of students receiving special education students. The case teachers and administrators considered working with parents a potential stress factor, yet with experience they had learned

strategies to communicate well with parents. Some teachers felt parents caused a great deal of stress. Naomi said,

> Difficult parents are a big reason why teachers leave. Teachers may feel that they just cannot endure another year of a difficult parent. Sometimes parents are so difficult that teachers just cannot recover from the experience, it's just too much and they can't recover. And choose to leave, either the system or the profession altogether. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

However, Naomi herself had learned how to communicate with parents in order to build good relationships. She said,

> I have a good working relationship with my parents. Some parents are very involved, some not as much. I feel like I meet the needs of the parents on my caseload and I make a point to reach out to the parents at the beginning of the year and introduce myself and then just touch base with them. I try to make a point to send home positive notes and have positive interactions so that when I need to share a behavioral concern that that's not the only kind of interaction I'm having with parents. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016

As a pre-kindergarten teacher, Lindsey had some specific issues with parents. She said, "Our biggest problem is that they baby their kids, . . . they coddle and baby [them]" (Interview, 11/3/2016). She also felt that sometimes parents' expectations were unreasonable and caused conflicting expectations for the teachers. She explained,

> I find the conflict with [expectations] is that the parents in some sense . . . my parent that I had issues with last year wanted us to teach him to read CVC [conso-

> nant-vowel-consonant] words, and I'm like, I just don't want him to punch me in the face anymore. (11/3/2016)

Her principal, Sarah, understood the stress that parents can cause special education teachers. She commented,

> I find two things can stress out a teacher to the point where they begin to think about what else to do. One can be a very difficult parent. I've seen that where a parent can just cause such unbelievable stress and I feel like as a principal that's when we really need to step in and be that protector . . . and really try to support that. (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016)

Despite Lindsey's occasional conflicts with parents, she said she worked hard to set up good working relationships with them by communicating early and often. When asked about her relationship with parents, she said,

> Most of the time a great relationship. They're . . . kind of at the beginning of their special ed career, so to speak. So, they are usually very appreciative and want suggestions, and only, I would say every other year I have a parent that is very demanding, and usually if you just have open communication with them and . . . you don't set up a situation where they are like battling you back, then usually it works out. (Lindsey Inteview, 11/3/2016)

One principal had a similar attitude about how to develop good relationships with parents, which he considered very important. Gary said,

> I think the relationships with the parents, especially in the initial eligibility and the initial IEPs is critical. You get that ball rolling and, with trust and an assumption of good will, it paves the way [for] a great relationship. And, you know, kids

> that are in special education really I think flourish more when you've got that teacher and that parent and they're all on the same page and really develop those plans together. (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016)

Ryan, the retired teacher, talked about parents as a stress factor. He said, "we certainly had some parents who were more demanding in the last about ten years. We had some fairly difficult, litigious, lawyer-driven meetings" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016). Later he again mentioned "demanding and litigious parents" (12/6/2016) as a possible source of special education teacher attrition, as discussed under the District Administration theme. Because it is parents who bring lawyers to IEP or eligibility meetings to make sure their rights are being upheld, the quote about litigious issues from Maureen, the District Director of Student Support, is also appropriate here: "parents are becoming more demanding; there's that litigious element that people really don't like" (Interview, 12/15/2016). The issue of litigation is important, and is discussed further under paperwork.

The currently working case teachers had positive relationships with parents and had learned strategies to foster good communication. However, both the teachers and administrators were aware of teachers who had a difficult time when parents had different ideas about what should be done for their child, became concerned about their rights being protected, or became involved with litigation. Teachers who were unable to keep the lines of communication open and had adversarial relationships with parents sometimes decided they would look for work elsewhere, whereas positive parent relationships served the children well, and encouraged teachers to stay.

Space. In addition to materials, space was also not a problem for the three case teachers currently working. Lindsey said, " I have a regular-sized classroom, which is just for me" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). Naomi also had plenty of space. She said,

> We actually have really good space for special ed. This class, the resource room does. We have two classrooms with an office, and this is not typical for special ed at all, but we're just very fortunate so when we need to pull students out I can pull to here. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Rebecca described her space as small, "it used to be an office or maybe, it is a little bit bigger than this . . . it's right off of the copier and all that stuff. But it's got two nice little windows" (Rebecca, 12/1/2016). But she commented that she had it to herself and felt it was plenty of space for her groups. They all considered space a retention factor. However, from my emic perspective, space could affect either retention or attrition. Since beginning at my school, I have shared a classroom and resource space for pullout instruction with four other teachers: two early intervention teachers, a gifted teacher, and one other special education teacher. The last two years, the other inclusion teacher in my school has left. Among other things, the inconvenience of teaching groups of children with attention issues in such a small and busy space was a problem for them. One transferred into general education, and the other chose to leave the school and become a tutor and substitute. At another school in the district, special education pullout instruction was offered at the end of large hallways, or in large stairwells. As the district grew, there were fewer and fewer classrooms for special education, and special area teachers (art, music, Spanish) went from class to class with a cart. From the historical perspective of space in special education, Ryan also commented,

> So we've come a long way, probably the biggest issue in the last 10 years was just space. We were just so pressed together. I think the last year that I was, we had like four, we were two special ed teachers and two intervention teachers here in a room, we weren't always in there, like we were in classrooms, but there could be four or five things going on there at the same time. That's probably the biggest problem. (Ryan Interview, 12/6/16)

I was unable to find specific historical information about the schools at the time when Ryan began almost 40 years ago, but it may also have been a time of growth for the district, which impacted the space available for special education teachers. If that is the case, there are implications for district administrators as the district grows.

It is also interesting to consider the perspectives of the more experienced teachers on space compared to the less experienced teachers (Table 6). The average response on the Likert scale about adequate space for the more experienced teachers, including Ryan, was 4 (agree, positive response). The average for the less experienced teachers was 3.27, much closer to "neutral." There were only five "more experienced" teachers (and 11 less experienced), so Ryan's presumably lower rating (based on his comments above) may have made the average rating lower than it would otherwise have been. Perhaps as the schools hire more special education teachers in response to growth, there is just not enough space to provide adequate resource rooms for all of them.

Negative themes affecting attrition. Eight negative themes emerged that teachers felt could affect attrition, including Role Conflict, Physical Demands, Growth/Advancement, Stress, Time, Scheduling, Workload, and Paperwork. Many of these themes overlapped and were cross-coded during analysis. Although these themes affected case teachers as negative aspects of their

jobs, they did not cause them to leave, but they perceived that colleagues often left as a result of these negative themes.

Role conflict. Role conflict had one of the lowest Likert-rating means on the Questionnaire from Phase 1, indicating it was a problem area and therefore a negative theme for many teachers in the district. Teachers suffered from role conflict when they got conflicting messages or directions from supervisors, parents, or peers, or felt that the directions were incompatible with their own special education training or experience. Role conflict was also a result when teachers were conflicted about time and schedules. The questionnaire responses revealed a high standard deviation for questions relating to role conflict. The iterative influence of the questionnaire affected the number of questions on the original interview protocol (Appendix D) related to this topic. In fact, five sub-questions were added to the revised teacher interview protocol (Appendix E; see also Table 5) in this area.

Specific quotes from each teacher revealed concerns with role conflict. Lindsey spent 8% of her interview discussing role conflict. She commented,

> I'm constantly in my head, spinning, thinking, okay, which thing do I pick to do? I'm part of the general ed instructional team meetings. And so they're working on . . . inquiry based learning. And we're learning about that and in the back of my head I'm thinking, "I just don't want him to push me over and run out the door anymore. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

The influence of conflicting messages from supervisors, parents, or peers, caused stress for Lindsey. Although she was a well educated and experienced teacher, she felt she could not always do what she knew was best for each child. During her interview, Naomi spent 28% of her

time on the topic of Role Conflict. Her views were similar to Lindsey's. As quoted at greater length under the PL theme, Naomi maintained,

> Balancing the needs of students with disabilities with the requirements of the general ed curriculum is difficult. So there's always the issue of whether to work on the lesson that's going on in the class or work on the IEP goals. And so that's always, that's always a hard balance to achieve. (Naomi, 11/7/2016)

Rebecca spent 7% of her interview time on role conflict issues. Her views also corroborated the views of the other case teachers. She commented,

> So, if I know that we really need to focus on phonics, but we're having our Expeditionary Learning Celebration [final public event at the end of an expedition] coming up, and they really need to get their notebooks organized. That sometimes has to take priority, which is really stressful for me. Because then I've got to find that time to do those phonics lessons or that math lesson that I really need to do again and again and again so they'll get it. So it's trying to keep them caught up and trying to meet the needs as we've outlined in the IEP, that's really difficult. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

Rebecca reiterated the different learning styles of students with special needs, that they may need daily, repeated lessons to master their IEP goals which will help them achieve grade level standards. Yet the learning expeditions were considered the most important part of the school's learning model for the class, so they cannot be left out of that. Role conflict also overlaps with the professional learning for EL, where teachers are sometimes required to be in a PL session for half the day, missing instructional time with their students. During a member check conversation, Lindsey agreed with Rebecca's point about the struggle to fulfill the tenets of EL and prepare for

the Celebration of Learning while trying to meet the needs outlined in the IEP. Lindsey commented, "This is a huge struggle for us, especially the newest teacher at our school. Some goals you know they need to practice everyday, but you don't have time to fit it all in" (Lindsey Member Check, 4/18/2017). Role conflict was a serious concern for all three of the currently working case teachers, Rebecca, Lindsey, and Naomi.

Supervisors also caused other kinds of role conflict for teachers, especially involving conflicts with time, which will be discussed in detail as its own theme. One principal listed some of the extra duties her special education teachers were called on to do during the school day. She mentioned,

> So it's not just a school psychologist that does the evaluation, it's a team approach. So it's always the school psychologist, a special ed teacher, and a speech and language pathologist, and together, as a team, they assess the children within a couple of hours. And we do them every Friday. And so, we try to spread that out if we can because they're writing lots of IEPs and whatnot . . . I can be a support and help out. But it's part of what every teacher battles, the amount of paperwork, the additional duties besides just coming in and writing your lesson plan and teaching, there's lot more to it, so I just, we just all try to help and to be supportive and a resource, and make sure they have the skills, and the materials, and what they need to do it. (Sarah Interview, 12/14/2016)

Sarah excused the requirements of all the meetings as "part of what every teacher battles," but another principal seemed aware of the stress of role conflict for her special education staff. She commented,

> I think the other thing that is tough; I'm not saying they have extra stuff to do, but sometimes there are a lot of meetings that I wonder if they couldn't be handled in other ways. Because now special ed teachers have, you know, the things that are required as part of gen ed, but some of mine are getting pulled for more and more stuff provides an additional . . . it's one thing if you really want to do it, it's another when it's kind of like, "I really need you to do this." (Dana Interview, 11/29/2016)

Dana's comment was the first time a principal acknowledged the number of meetings that special education teachers have, and the ensuing struggle with role conflict, and suggested that perhaps the requirements of general education teacher meetings might be "handled in other ways" for special education teachers. As mentioned by Sarah, the principal in the PK setting, there were additional stressors in early learning not seen in the K-3 schools. Lindsey referred to it as "wearing multiple hats" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). She had to be pulled out of class to participate in Child Find, a legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to special education services. Child Find covered every child from birth through age 21. The school had to evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability (Lee, 2014-2017). Lindsey needed to do screeners, observe children, and make recommendations. She and/or her colleague also met with the parents and the coordinator for Babies Can't Wait, a program to assist families in providing early intervention therapy for their pre-school child, to set up assessments, which also required a special educator to be pulled out of her normal schedule. She participated in Arena screenings, which were assessment activities where a facilitator conducted the assessment activities across all areas while other team members observed, as well as eligibility meetings where a team determined eligibility of a child for special education services, and

Response to Intervention (RtI) meetings. Meanwhile, she still needed to teach and/or create plans for a substitute for when she was out at meetings, meet with parents, and be responsible for her student caseload. Lindsey summed it up with, "Just the juggle. I think that, to me, that is where I get stressed, I'm like, okay, what do I do first?" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). When asked about managing that schedule and the substitutes needed, Lindsey explained her conflicting responsibilities further in follow-up email correspondence,

> On Friday's we have student assessments and eligibilities. We try to keep it all on Friday so only one sub is needed. [My colleague] and I have started sharing this role. We do get a sub on those days. If we have eligibility meetings on another day we typically schedule them during rest time and my para [assistant teacher] covers. We have Babies Can't Wait transition meetings as they come up--a couple of month. Typically our principal will find someone to cover our class. RTI is twice per week typically during rest time or after school. My para takes over since we have a couple of students that do not rest. Yes, I am required to do lesson plans and upload them to a Google file. Sometimes I get frustrated sitting in RTI meetings when I could be working with a student or working on activities for my students. Same for Friday Arena assessments; it's like double duty. I have to assess, attend the eligibility and write the IEP for a student I may not even serve. Having [a new colleague] on board now has helped a lot. It has always been our biggest problem. We really need a part time teacher that could be in charge of new student transitions since we have so many each year. (Lindsey Follow-Up Email, 4/16/17)

Lindsey's struggle with role conflict is clear in her litany of duties. How can she server the children on her caseload when she has to leave the room to attend to many other duties? Sometimes teachers experienced role conflict between the academic and social/behavioral needs of the students as well. Ryan, the retired teacher, mentioned,

> Yes, sometimes [they] weren't really ready to learn . . . We had kids that would come in and they would fall asleep, and we just had to use good judgment, and know that if you let them sleep for 45 minutes they might work the rest of the day [laughs]. (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016)

Maureen also acknowledged that special education teachers might have more role conflict struggles than general education teachers. She said,

> When folks take the special ed job they think, oh I'm going to work with small groups of kids and it's going to be really lovely, and they don't realize that there are all these other adult pieces that are part of the job. Whereas when you're a [general ed] third grade teacher, you still have some of that, but the bulk of your days are just with the little people, where you get to tell people how to talk to you, and how to write to you, and what to say, and how to do it. And I think that in special education there's a lot of navigation between adults: coaching other adults to utilize strategies to implement plans . . . It's hard work. (Maureen Interview, 12/15/2016)

When comparing the perspectives of the more experienced teachers to the less experienced teachers regarding role conflict based on the questionnaire responses (Table 6), it is interesting to note that the more experienced teachers had a more negative view of role conflict (average score 1.60) than the less experienced teachers (2.6). Although both are low averages, be-

tween 1 (strongly disagree) and 3 (neutral), I found the results surprising. Maybe the more experienced teachers had higher expectations about communication among supervisors, parents, and teachers, having been in the small schools longer, while the less experienced teachers from larger systems were not used to having good communication with supervisors about their role, so accepted it as the norm.

Physical demands. Another negative theme that emerged was the physical demands of the job, which also tied in to increased stress. Although the teachers did not mention it often, they had some serious concerns. Lindsey commented,

> We're up and down and all around, like, I don't sit down very often. I don't have anyone this year that we have to actually lift or position, [but] we're constantly on the move . . . I think my job is more physical, I'm more physically tired at the end of the day. Because you're running around all day and dealing with temper tantrums and potty training. (Interview, 11/3/2016)

Another type of physical demand for Lindsey had to do with student behavior, "We were hit, bit, kicked, hair pulled, anything, chasing kids out of the room" (Interview, 11/3/2016). Naomi, who planned to retire at the end of the year, also had concerns with the physical exertion of her job. She stated,

> We are on our feet a lot. We have a lot of stairs, and, as I mentioned, this is my 33rd year teaching and I'm getting older. And so, it is now becoming a concern about being responsible for students who are runners, students who require restraint . . . as students are placed in classes, that is not a consideration necessarily, whether a teacher would be able to handle restraint. Sometimes there's a thought that, oh there's a para in the room, [but] it's just not acceptable to place this

> teacher with a student and have the para be the primary person responsible for that student. The teacher just cannot be the weakest link in the classroom. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

According to Naomi, behavior concerns were not just causing physical exertion, but were a real stress factor that could encourage teachers to leave the school or the field. She emphasized that, "they [can] disrupt the entire class, whether it be general ed class, whether it be special ed class; students who have severe behavior concerns are reasons that teachers leave" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). Rebecca's concerns were also related to physical demands involved with student behavior. In her interview, she stated,

> The beginning of the year was rougher physically for me because of the behavior issues. We were restraining one third-grader and one second-grader, only if we absolutely had to, of course, so it wasn't every day. But once we got a good program in place for both of them, then the physical part settled down.
>
> (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

The physical demands may be greater for the primary school age group in the study (PK-3rd grade), because teachers are expected to be able to handle small children who are running away, who need lifting or repositioning or toilet training. This may be another consideration for the difference between primary and upper grades, in addition to the growing caseload in primary schools because of frequent eligibilities, as mentioned in the Problem Statement, and was considered a potential attrition factor for the teachers.

Growth/advancement. The lack of opportunities for growth or advancement was also a negative theme for the currently working teachers, and could lead toward increased attrition. Two of the three teachers especially emphasized the lack of growth and advancement, either for

more money or for different opportunities. Lindsey said there were only two levels within special education, teaching or becoming a district administrator, and there were only two positions at the district level. She said, "I don't want to go into administration. I know that for sure. But . . . a larger school district would have more opportunities and maybe different types of positions than we have because we are so small" (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016). Rebecca was disappointed that teachers were never offered the opportunity to share their special skills with their colleagues:

> Sometimes I feel frustrated that there are people who have a lot to give to the system, [but they] are not allowed to. For instance, I have a really good track record with behavior disorders. So the kids who have been around in different schools have been sent to us . . . My master's degree is in behavior disorders. I don't feel like we have enough opportunities to share [our skills] with other teachers. I know there are people who could teach me a ton of things that I don't know, about dyslexia, or any other kind of thing. I feel like I have stuff to offer, but we don't share that. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

When talking about collaborating with fourth grade teachers to transition her third graders, Rebecca mentioned it again, how much she could learn from the 4/5 teachers and they could learn from her if they were given the opportunity to share more.

However, the third case teacher, Naomi, felt satisfied with the opportunities for growth in the small schools, even if they did not necessarily include a higher salary. As quoted in the Small Schools theme, she mentioned, "They added the IEP lead teacher positions, there are committees and things that one can serve on . . . [and] opportunities for attending training" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). She did not crave a leadership position, and was not interested in offering training workshops, as Rebecca was. "IEP lead teachers" were not the same as Rebecca's refer-

ence to Lead Teacher in Special Education, as mentioned in the District Administration theme. One teacher from each school had been trained on the new IEP system the district had adopted, and were responsible for helping the teachers at their schools with it. They received a small stipend for that work, and continued to have a full caseload. Although I could not resolve this difference in interpretation of growth/advancement between Naomi and the other two currently working case teachers, I can only surmise that Naomi's plan to retire at the end of the year may have affected her interest level in advancement opportunities, but for teachers earlier in their careers, more opportunities for advancement may increase retention in the small schools. Whether they desired advancement or not, the lack of opportunity was considered a potential reason for attrition.

Stress. Role conflict can be one source of stress, but there are several themes that are also closely related. Stress was a major attrition factor for teachers, as also mentioned in the literature (see Key Findings in Chapter 5). Stress is affected by several sub-themes, including time, scheduling, workload, and paperwork. On Table 6, the experienced teachers responses to the questionnaire on items related to Stress Related to Job Design averaged 1.63, between 1 (strongly disagree) and 2 (disagree), indicating a strong negative factor leading towards attrition. Yet these experienced teachers had managed to handle the stress and must have found the positive factors strong enough for them to decide to retain their jobs. The less experienced teachers responses on the items about stress average 2.60, which, while still below "neutral," was less negative than the more experienced teachers, which I found surprising. In the literature, it is often newer teachers who experience more stress (Duffy & Forgan, 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Israel, Kamman, McCray, & Sindelar, 2014; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). However, since even the teachers newer to the district have previous experience as special edu-

cation teachers, they may have found the stress levels in the small school less than in their previous larger schools.

Time. Time was perhaps the most significant stress factor, as the lack of time caused problems for most of the other negative themes – time was needed for paperwork, for collaboration, for scheduling services, for communicating with parents, for meetings, and for PL. The items on the Special Education Teacher Questionnaire related to "Stress Related to Having Time to Fulfill All My Obligations at Work" had a Likert-rating mean of 2.08 and a standard deviation of 1, so it fell within aspects of the job that could affect attrition. Table 10 indicates that both Lindsey and Naomi spent over 20% of their interview referring to issues regarding time, no matter what the interview question was. Rebecca spent 8% of her interview on time specifically, but as indicated, several themes overlapped with time such as workload (15% for Rebecca), stress (12%) and role conflict (7%). As seen in Table 9, "Time in Daily Schedule Not Devoted to Student Interaction," Lindsey had 30 minutes twice a week for planning when students were in the building, and even then she may have had a student in the room, "From 1:15-2:00 I am in an RTI, Eligibility or other meeting around 3 days per week. Otherwise that can be considered planning even though I have one student in the classroom" (Email Correspondence with Lindsey, 3/4/17). Naomi, however, was able to meet with her grade level team twice a week for an hour. According to caseload data reported in Table 8, Naomi worked with third grade students exclusively, so did not have to divide her time between grade levels. However, besides the twice weekly grade level collaboration, Naomi had one other day with a 30-minute planning period and one day with no planning. She usually had a duty-free lunch, but commented, "[I have] lunch with students one day every week, some other days if students are having a bad day or no sub" (Email Correspondence with Naomi, 3/6/17). Rebecca, who was responsible for two grade

levels (Table 8), was able to schedule 60 consecutive minutes every day for planning and/or collaboration, and her lunch period was duty-free. Lindsey considered Rebecca's schedule ideal for a special education teacher (Member Check, (4/18/2017). When describing her day, Lindsey said she starting seeing students at 7:30, the moment she walked in, and has very little time the rest of her day. In her interview, Lindsey mentioned,

> I always feel like there's another RTI meeting, and there's another [trails off]. We used to plan Thursday afternoons, but we didn't today for some reason. But we always need more time. Absolutely. And to plan with my para, and plan with [co-teachers]. And you get to the end of the day and it's 'Hooo!' you're frazzled and you forget what you wanted to talk to them about. (Lindsey Interview, 11/3/2016)

Naomi spoke about time issues 28% of her interview. She considered lack of time the most stressful aspect of her job. She said,

> I think that my biggest stressor is feeling like it's never done, that my job is never done, and I don't have time to do what I know I need to do. I'm clear about what my students needs are; I'm clear about what I need to do. I don't have time to do my best. And, so I think that that's my biggest stressor, is that I feel like the students are so needy, and they deserve more than I can give them. That, and the meetings and the professional development [which take time] are, those are the biggest stressors. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Despite her knowledge of what she needed to do, the workload demanded by the school and the lack of time frustrated her plans to give the students what they needed. She explained it further this way,

> Teachers need time for planning, preparing, and they also need time to rest and recover. And many special ed teachers don't have planning periods or lunch breaks, and our planning is done at home. And our [teacher] workdays [when students are not present] are not workdays; our workdays are professional development days. That's a lot of commitments. (Naomi, 11/17/2016)

She also mentioned that planning time could sometimes be further reduced because of severe student needs. She commented,

> I have one student who has a physical disability and requires assistance in specials, and another student who has behavioral concerns so he requires support in specials. So there's not a scheduled planning time. I may get two planning periods a week if I'm not needed to support a student who is having difficulties in class, [or] in a special, then I can have a planning time. And, because I've had a student who has started to need support at lunch, I don't always get lunch either. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Rebecca's statement about time really showed the interweaving of time, paperwork, and workload. She stated,

> I think the lack of time comes in there. It is just so, so busy. I don't begrudge meeting with the grade level team twice a week during planning, but that leaves me three days of planning to get special ed paperwork done. So if I'm now doing the re-eval data, you know, compiling all my data at that time, or checking on progress report data, or you know just getting everything together during those other three days . . . I think it's important to meet with the team but at the same

> time, that's time that I really need, so I find that I'm doing it at night. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/16)

Rebecca mentioned similar concerns with stress and time related to serving children with emotional/behavioral needs individual needs. She stated,

> When you have a student with severe emotional needs, a lot of the time, the other kids' needs tend to get pushed to the side. And then we're playing catch-up . . . it was really tough for me, that was a big conflict for me, just feeling exhausted and like going home every day and thinking they're not getting what they need because I can't get to them. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

The distraction of having to deal with a student with emotional or behavioral needs affected her time teaching both that child and the others she was responsible for. Richard, the district Coordinator, also understood this concern. He commented, "Sometimes they get pressure from parents, but sometimes it's an internal pressure that they just wish they could do more for kids" (Richard Interview, 10/19/2016).

Seven of the negative themes (role conflict, physical demands, stress, time, scheduling, workload, and paperwork – all except growth and advancement) are closely related and are the most negative themes that emerged. From the teachers' perspectives, these were the most likely to lead to attrition. However, for the three currently working case teachers, these aspects were not enough to lead them to leave their positions.

Scheduling. One aspect of stress that teachers mentioned was scheduling. Ryan, the retired teacher, said, "scheduling was really, really hard, because we were trying to do, you know, a number of different models" (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016). One of the principals also understood the stress of scheduling, "when teachers schedule their classes and then the special ed

teacher has to come in and figure [it] out, - when you're all teaching math and when you're teaching science, reading and things and jumping in, I think that's difficult" (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016). From my emic perspective, scheduling was one of the most stressful things as the school year started. Especially when serving more than one grade level, it was very difficult to create a schedule to cover all the IEP services for students when general education teachers did not yet have their schedules confirmed, IEP's were being amended causing services to change, and the schedules of the speech pathologist and occupational therapist also had to be considered. For students needing resource room time, it was especially complex, because they could not miss the co-taught general education sections of math and reading, and they were protected from being pulled out from music, Spanish, PE, art, and of course daily recess. The final two themes, workload and paperwork, overlap greatly with stress and with each other. Although they are related, I wanted to address each separately to try to untangle the various issues affecting attrition in these negative themes.

Workload. The workload theme emerged as one of the biggest aspects of stress. For the 16 teachers who completed the questionnaire, the "Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload" category resulted in a low Likert-rating mean (2.70), and all five items in that category had standard deviations greater than one, showing disparity among the responses. The lowest rating was for the number of things teachers were expected to do in their job (M=2.17). When comparing the responses of teachers with more experience in the district, it was clear that they had a more negative view on workload that the teachers with fewer years of district experience. The teachers with five or more years of experience had an average response rate of 2.37 for workload, and the teachers with less than five years of experience had an average of 3.85. The experienced teachers were closer to "disagree," which meant workload was a potential attrition

factor, and the less experienced closer to "agree," which meant the workload was bearable, and would not cause attrition. This category had the greatest disparity for two groups of teachers. It may be that the teachers with more experience actually had greater demands put on them, for work related to the school and/or the district. From my emic perspective, I have had some additional expectations added over my few years, including mentoring new special education colleagues, attending eligibility meetings for students not on my caseload, and even attending eligibility and IEP meetings during the summer break, since the legal deadlines cannot be avoided.

When asked about workload specifically, Naomi also commented on the number of things teachers were expected to do, and she felt that was a reason for attrition. She commented,

> The reason why people leave this school district . . . I think probably the number one reason is there's just too much extra work. Like I said, this is the third system that I've worked in. And there are just so many extra things that we do [here] that other systems don't do. We have a lot of meetings, just a lot of meetings. We have regular meetings on many days a week, every week is a staff meeting, and then there's a [team meeting] on Friday, and there's a special ed meeting on Thursday, and then with the IEP meetings, parent conferences, required school functions . . . that's just a lot for people. Many weeks there may be [only] one afternoon without a commitment. That's a lot . . . So that's one reason . . . I think in special ed in general, but in particular [this district] is really heavy on a lot of extra work. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Similarly, Lindsey was stressed by the workload in general. As quoted under the Time theme, she was exhausted by the end of the day with the pressure to accomplish so much each day. She felt "frazzled" (11/3/16) by the end of the day.

Rebecca had a somewhat different comment on workload than Naomi, and related it mostly to her caseload. When she compared it to a former school. She said,

> I cannot complain at all about my workload, because having come from [my old school] where I had many more students, I'm not going to complain about five. The workload is tough, but I'm getting it done . . . I would say the severity of the disabilities is to me the biggest factor, and that goes back to that class that I had before, where if we plan correctly, I think we could do a better job of meeting the needs, because right now the five kids that I have, the four who have learning issues, they're so different, and they're all severe in their own right, but because the four of them are all so different, if I've got one who really can barely write legibly, and I'm trying to help him with technology to do his writing, and the other one's stress level is so high that I'm trying to shorten what he's writing. (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/2016)

In a member check conversation, Rebecca said she did end up with ten students on her caseload by the end of the year, because students became eligible as the year went on, so her caseload grew. She commented that her biggest caseload ever was 11 at the end of one year, but compared it to her old school where she had caseloads of up to 15 regularly, and the state limit was 26. She said the number of students on her caseload greatly affects her workload – more IEPs and progress reports to write, more meetings, and more services to provide.

Paperwork. On the questionnaire from Phase 1, the line item regarding "Stress Related to Bureaucratic Requirements, Rules, Regulations, or Paperwork" had a Likert-rating mean (M=2.08), with a standard deviation greater than 1.0, indicating variability in teachers' opinions. The experienced case teachers found paperwork tiresome, but accepted it. As stated by

Lindsey, “the paperwork and stuff, that just kind of comes with the job” (11/3/2016). The teachers realized how important it was, due to the aforementioned legal mandates regarding special education. So, despite being accepted as part of the job, paperwork still created another source of stress and another aspect that takes time. Naomi stated,

> Unfortunately the paperwork had to come first, because we can’t have expired IEPs, we can’t have expired eligibilities, we have to have progress reports on time, we have to have report cards on time. Those things have to happen on time. And, when there is limited time it is the instruction that suffers. (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016)

Rebecca also mentioned that, since twice a week her hour of planning was with the grade level team, she had a hard time getting all the special education paperwork done. She said, “I’ll sometimes work like three or four hours at night if I’m writing an IEP or getting ready for a re-eval, just taking it home and doing it” (Rebecca Interview, 12/1/16). Ryan, the retired teacher, also mentioned, “Paperwork is daunting” (Ryan Interview, 12/6/2016).

When asked what teachers at his school might find difficult, one principal said, “Surprise! Documentation, paperwork, [and] preparing for IEPs” (Gary Interview, 11/29/2016). The PK principal, Sarah, was also aware of the burden of paperwork. She stated, “it’s part of what every teacher battles, the amount of paperwork, the additional duties besides just coming in and writing your lesson plan and teaching” (12/14/2016).

The data collected around these 20 themes provide insight into the perspectives of special education teachers working in small schools, and what might encourage retention. In the following discussion, I review the connections and contradictions with previous literature about special education teacher attrition and retention.

5 DISCUSSION

The present study explored the themes surrounding the retention of experienced special education teachers in small primary schools. It is important to remember that each school district is unique, and affected by its own unique character. For the district under consideration, some unique examples included, 1) the principals were very involved as supervisors of special education teachers, 2) The schools used the Expeditionary Learning model, 3) the district was high performing, and 4) the district was affluent, and had a high degree of parent involvement. In this chapter, I summarize the results and then discuss my key findings in relation to the literature to answer my research questions. Finally, I discuss the implications, limitations and recommendations for further research.

Introduction/Summary of the Study

The background problem of this study was the shortage and high turnover rate of special education teachers (Billingsley 2005; Boe, 2006; Duffy & Forgan, 2005), and the impact on students with special needs (Billingsley, 2005; Bull, Oliver, Callaghan, & Woodcock, 2015; Chung, Edgar-Smith, Palmer, Chung, DeLambo, & Huang, 2015; Hume, Sreckovic, Snyder, & Carnahan, 2014). The main purpose of this study was to describe the perspective of experienced special education teachers in small PK or K-3 schools, and to explain the organizational and individual factors that influenced their decision to stay in their schools. I also had an activist stance and a lens toward change. I wanted to influence policy to help schools retain capable special education teachers.

In keeping with my belief that knowledge is constructed by human experience, and can only be obtained by qualitative involvement with participants, I chose a multiple-case study. The study was designed in two phases, with documents and quantitative data from a questionnaire

collected and analyzed first, the results of which informed iteratively the next, qualitative phase. In accordance with Yin (2003), I conducted my case study using many kinds of data, both quantitative and qualitative. I collected data using a Likert scale questionnaire, document analysis, personal interviews, and teacher member checks. I interviewed three experienced special education case teachers employed in the schools, one retired teacher who had worked many years in the schools, two district administrators, and four principals, all employed in (or retired from) the same small PK and K-3 schools in the targeted district. I used descriptive statistics to analyze the questionnaire, and used data from documents to compare to the responses from the interviews. I used content coding (Ezzy, 2002) and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the interviews.

Key Findings in Relation to the Literature

When examining previous research about special education teacher retention, it became apparent that none of the previous studies I found examined teacher retention issues in small schools. Many of the findings in this study are consistent with the research about special education teacher retention in schools of any size. However, several findings were apparently at odds with or missing from earlier research, and some surprising and unique themes emerged. My findings are organized by research question. My research questions were:

1. What are the perspectives of experienced special education teachers working in small PK or K-3 schools about the organizational and individual factors that affect their decision to continue teaching special education in a small school?
2. Which factors of employment are most important to special education teachers at all levels of experience in the small PK and K-3 schools to promote retention?

3. What are the principals' perceptions about which factors affect special education teacher retention in their small PK or K-3 school, and how do their views coincide with the teachers' perspectives?

Question 1: Organizational and individual factors that affect retention decisions.

The first question relates to the perspective of experienced special education teachers working in small schools about the factors that led to their retention decision, both organizational and personal. When talking about retention, it is the positive themes that emerged from the data that most directly answer that question; the themes that encouraged teachers to stay. The eight positive themes that emerged included Benefits/Courtesy Tuition, Principals, Caseload Size, School Size, Collaboration, Intrinsic Rewards/Motivation, Experience/Education, and Materials.

Benefits/Courtesy tuition. The results of the data from the current study in these small schools do not corroborate the finding on benefits from previous research. A study by Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) was similar to my study in many ways. The researchers interviewed five retired teachers and surveyed 31 currently serving teachers about their decisions to stay in the field of special education. However, they did not mention school size as a criterion in choosing participants, as I did. They found that financial compensation was one of the key factors encouraging teacher retention. Two other studies mentioned compensation as an important benefit (Darling-Hammond & Sykies, 2003; Hughes, 2012). In my study on teachers in small schools, compensation was not mentioned as a retention factor, but it was surprising to discover that the Courtesy Tuition benefit offered by the district was an important factor for the retention of two of the four case teachers. This theme may be unique to this school district, because only high-performing small schools would be able to draw and retain teachers for that reason.

Principals. The findings in the current study about principals were related to results of previous research in several ways. School principals were one of the most cited aspects of the work place affecting retention and attrition among special education teachers according to research. One study (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015) conducted a survey of 80 teachers in 20 schools focusing on teacher retention and principal support in hard-to-staff schools. The study did not account for school size in participant selection, but the findings were similar to the current study of small schools attesting to the strong influence of positive principal support on special education teacher retention.

In another large study by Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994), 613 special education participants were asked to complete questionnaires about principal support. The researchers found that many of the teachers perceived the support from principals as unhelpful, and not the kind of support they needed. The study included school of any size. In my study on small schools, principals were extremely involved with special education, and teachers appreciated their support and considered them a major factor increasing retention. It may be that in small schools, it is easier for principals to get to know the students and their families because of the smaller numbers. Also, they are the only school-based support person for special education teachers in the schools in this study, so they may strive to involve themselves as much as possible.

Another study (Otto & Arnold, 2005) found that experienced special education teachers considered administrators more supportive than newer teachers did. The study did not consider school size, but in the current study in this small school setting this was not the case. The experienced teachers scored an average of 4.47 (out of 5) on the questionnaire section about principal support, between "agree" and "strongly agree." The teachers with less experience scored an av-

erage of 4.21 on the principal category of the questionnaire, so the averages were very close together, and both very positive. Questionnaire results also revealed principals as the third most important factor for retention out of the 13 categories, and the first factor that was organizational/extrinsic.

Some research mentioned the need for principals to increase their knowledge of special education (Cale et al, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). Similarly, despite the teachers' appreciation for the work of the principals in the small schools, some teachers and district administrators in the small schools in this case study also felt that principals could benefit from more staff development about special education.

Caseload size. The findings about caseload size in this study were reflected in literature as a factor in retention and attrition decisions. Research attested that caseload size affected workload manageability and stress. For example, a synthesis of research since 1995 on teacher burnout in special education by Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) indicated that caseload size contributed to attrition. The authors recommended smaller caseloads to increase retention. The studies reviewed were large, and did not indicate the size of the schools. In the current study of small schools, teachers considered caseload size and school size closely related. The case teachers had all experienced much larger caseloads in previous schools, and attributed the smaller caseload size as one factor in their decision to remain in their positions.

School Size. School size was not a theme in the special education literature that I reviewed. Only one study looked at special education and small schools (Jessen, 2013), and that study was focused on high school seniors and their families in New York City, and was concerned with the effects of public school choice in New York as it relates to services for students with special needs. In the current study about special education teacher perspectives, the small

school size was appreciated, for some of the same reasons found in the literature about small schools in general – the frequency of principal contact (Berry, 2012; Gersten et al., 2001), and the ability of the school to make changes in a systematic way (Heath, 2006). Although these studies were not specifically about special education, the described benefits of small schools were similar to the results of the current study about the effect of school size for the special education department as well.

Collaboration. Similar to the current study, previous research suggested that collegial relationships encourage retention (Bennet et al., 2013). Whereas some previous literature about collaboration in special education found that special educators feel isolated, need mentorship and need increased peer support (Billingsley 2005; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), this was not the case according to the teachers in the small schools in this study. Special education teachers in these small schools were positive about collaboration with special and general education peers, and felt like they were part of a team. They considered the camaraderie in the school a retention factor. The one negative factor was not with the colleagues, but with the lack of time to collaborate with peers (Kaff, 2014; Billingsley. 2010; Prather-Jones, 2011), which will be discussed in Key Findings about Stress and Related Themes below.

Intrinsic Rewards/Motivation. Similar to the current study, several previous research studies found that people who start in the field of special education were often intrinsically motivated (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Bennett et al., 2002). Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012), using interviews with retired teachers and online surveys with currently serving teachers to study motivation, found that participants named intrinsic motivators as the most important reason they were attracted to the profession. Other literature mentioned the importance of emotional support, both for beginning and mid-career teacher motivation, as a retention factor (Kirkpatrick & Johnson,

2014). However, not one of the studies was based on small schools. However, the results of the questionnaire I administered indicated similar results about the importance of intrinsic rewards. The strongest positive factors on the questionnaire were Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards and Affective Issues Related to Students, both intrinsic factors related to relationships and Intrinsic Rewards. The case teachers all told stories that indicated personal motivation in their decisions to teach special education as well, such as experience with students with special needs during teacher training, a sibling with special needs, or a summer camp experience volunteering at a camp for students with special needs. This theme was both found in the literature and confirmed in the current study for these small schools.

Experience and education. In the current study, I discovered that most of the teachers hired in the district had many years of experience elsewhere, and are fully certified in their field, and therefore felt confident in their teaching skills and their knowledge of special education. Similarly, previous studies about teachers with professional certification and experience have higher retention rates ((Morvant et al., 1995; Whitaker, 2003). A previous study by Boe (1997) concluded that greater retention could be reached if schools hired teachers with the following characteristics: "1) Hire experienced teachers, ages 35-55, who have dependent children over age 5; and 2) Place these teachers in full-time assignments, for which they are fully certified, and pay them high salaries" (p. 407). The research in the study was based on large national databases, and did not account for school size, but the high level of experience and professional education of the case teachers in the small schools in the current study may have influenced their retention. Brownell (2002) also suggested that, "young, inexperienced teachers are more likely to either leave the classroom or indicate an intention to leave than are their more experienced counterparts" (p. 4).

Materials. The case teachers considered the availability of materials in the small schools in the current study a retention factor. This theme was not reflected in the literature. In one literature review (Bozonelos, 2008), several studies were found that indicated special education teachers did not feel they were provided with adequate resources to do their job. Other studies specifically found that lack of materials was an attrition factor in special education (Wisniewski and Gargiulo, 1997; Prather-Jones, 2011) In the current study on small schools, participants agreed that materials were amply provided and more could be accessed during the year as student needs arose. However, when comparing teacher views on materials according to the questionnaire, the teachers with more district experience were more satisfied with the availability of materials than the newer teachers. This may be because the teachers with more district experience knew more about how to access materials in the district. In that case, making sure that information is shared with new teachers would also be an implication for administrators or colleagues.

Other themes emerged that may have encouraged some teachers to leave, but the experienced teachers found the benefits of remaining in the field stronger than the negative aspects of the job. These themes that could affect either retention or attrition included District Administration, Professional Learning, Parents, and Space.

District administration. Participants in the current study had mixed responses about district administration as a factor of retention or attrition. Participants in the current study felt district administrators were helpful, and offered good information, but were too busy to provide much support, or did not communicate enough with either the school principals or the teachers themselves to ensure clear directives for teachers. One case teacher knew two previous colleagues who left the school mainly as a result of poor communication with district administrators. Many studies about central office administration on special education teachers were simi-

larly inconclusive. In a literature review by Billingsley (2004), studies indicated that the impact of central office administration on teachers' decisions to stay was mixed. One study by Gersten, et al. (2001) indicated that central office administrators had only an indirect influence, mostly based on professional development opportunities and stress related to job design. Another study by Billingsley, et al. (1995), found that teachers were dissatisfied with central office administrators more often than with school principals. Participants included 470 special education teachers. Specific school size was not mentioned in these studies, but I found it surprising that district support would not be any better in a small district where staff had more opportunity to communicate with administrators than they do in large schools. Apparently this aspect needs attention at both large and small schools.

Professional learning. As in the small schools in the current study, many of the previous research studies found that Professional Learning was a factor in both attrition and retention decisions. Two studies by Billingsley (2004a, 2005) revealed that limited professional development was a key factor of special educator attrition, whereas appropriate professional development activities both inspired teachers and helped them improve instruction. She found that many special educators claimed not to receive any professional development, or found the PL offered by their school not helpful for what they do.

Previous literature and the current study were alike in that professional development can lead to either retention or attrition for special educators. Some research included some recommendations for practice not unlike those suggested in the current study. Benedict, Brownell, Yujeong, Bettini, and Lauterbach (2014), recommended teachers take charge of their own professional learning by targeting an area for growth, making time to learn from peers, reading journals, and attending skill-specific trainings. Similarly, one teacher in the current study suggested

special educators in the district could learn from each other, share their expertise, and observe each other to add to their instructional techniques. Instituting professional learning communities could provide a structure for this type of collaboration. This would be one way of increasing professional learning for special educators in small schools. However, teachers in the small schools brought up a concern with too many hours of professional learning that did not apply to their work with students with special needs, yet their attendance was required. They felt the required PL reduced their instructional time with students but did not add to their special education skills. This problem was not found in the literature reviewed. It may be that the unique Expeditionary Learning Model required more PL than other schools, leaving little time for additional PL specifically provided for special education teachers.

Parents. Although small school advocates consider relationships to parents as a positive factor in small schools in general (Hughes, 2012), the data collected in the current study was somewhat mixed about the theme of the parents of students in special education programs. Participants said parents were often a cause of stress for some teachers, whereas the case teachers' own experience with parents was positive, because they were able to develop positive relationships and communicate regularly. However, both teachers and administrators mentioned the issue of litigation, which is initiated by parents who invite lawyers to meetings to ensure the rights of the child and the family. This is a potential stress factor that can drive special education teachers to leave the profession. In previous research, one study maintained that, "threats of litigation . . . were noted as critical concerns regarding retention in the field" (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Other previous research studies also revealed varying views on the relationship between special education teachers and the parents of their students. Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, and Farmer, (2011) conducted telephone surveys with rural special education teachers and found that teachers would

like more professional development in dealing with parents. The researchers did not refer to school size, although rural schools tend to be small (Bouck, 2004).

Space. For the case teachers in the current study, workspace was adequate, but from my emic perspective, space was a concern, especially as the small school population grew and teachers were required to share rooms, use hallway spaces, or make due with very little or crowded spaces for resource room work. In previous research, the concern about space was not so much the lack, but the location. Billingsley (2010) found that special educators were often in a physically isolated space, such as portables or separate wings of the school, which inhibited collaboration and increased isolation. The findings of the study on small schools about crowded spaces were not correlated with previous literature, which emphasized isolation.

The negative themes that emerged in my study as aspects of the job that may increase attrition were Role Conflict, Physical Demands, Growth/Advancement, Stress, Time, Scheduling, Workload, and Paperwork. These themes were interrelated as some aspects of the job may affect several of these negative themes. Most of these negative factors were evident in previous research as well, and have long been a concern in the field of special education teacher retention.

Role conflict. In my study on these small district schools, study participants suggested that teachers sometimes consider leaving their positions due to role conflict between school and district administrators, demands of the IEP versus general education goals, and Expeditionary Learning requirements and training versus time needed to fulfill IEP services. Findings from previous research corroborate the theme of role conflict as an attrition factor. Some studies found role conflict a source of stress (Billinglsey, 2004; Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane, 2014). Another study suggested administrators should have training in how to avoid role conflict (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). None of these studies focused on small schools, but the findings of

the current study on these small schools were similar. Possible role conflict is more intense in the schools under investigation, given the unique Expeditionary Learning model, the heavy emphasis on PL, and the apparent lack of communication between district administrators, principals, and teachers.

Growth/Advancement. One theme that emerged in the current study was the lack of opportunities for growth or advancement. Teachers suggested avenues of growth that may help maintain their interest and level of commitment – work on committees, sharing expertise, becoming a lead teacher, or mentoring. Two of the case teachers craved more opportunities to grow professionally, by sharing skills or finding other opportunities for advancement. They cared about their students, really loved their jobs, and felt confident based on their education and experience. But sometimes they felt something was lacking, such as Rebecca's desire to share her skills with other special education teachers and to have the opportunity to learn from them. The third teacher may have felt the same way some years ago, but was planning to retire at the end of the year of the study, so was perhaps not interested in advancement at that time. In a study by Kirkpatrick and Johnson (2014), the researchers studied twelve mid-career teachers with four to six years of experience from two different schools with 1500 students each. They found that these mid-career teachers had been interested and engaged, but, as their confidence and independence grew, they began to lose interest in teaching and craved something new . The researchers suggested that administrators pay more attention to mid-career teachers, to help them maintain motivation and therefore interest in student learning. They suggested it was important for retention to keep them engaged so they would choose to stay on. The schools they studied were large, but one suggestion for further research was to "learn much more about second-stage teachers and their experiences in a range of school settings" (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014, p. 19) The

study suggested that experienced, confident mid-career teachers could easily lose their intrinsic motivation to continue in their positions, and may look elsewhere if not given new opportunities or challenges. The comments from teachers in the current study corroborated with these findings.

Stress and Related Themes. In my study on small schools, study participants suggested that teachers may leave their positions due to lack of communication from the district administrators, lack of experienced special education leadership at the school site (such as a lead teacher), the physical demands of the job, as well as other factors related to stress – time, scheduling, workload, and paperwork. Similarly, stress was often mentioned in previous literature as an attrition factor. In a literature review on stress in special education, Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) found that stress can be induced by the challenges of serving and meeting the needs of children with multiple disabilities or intense needs, lack of materials, excessive paperwork, lack of opportunities, feeling lack of control, lack of recognition, and low pay. In the current study, lack of time in teachers' schedules also emerged as one of the highest negative themes that caused stress, inhibited collaboration with co-teachers and peers, caused teachers to have to work at home to complete paperwork, and, from both the teachers' and administrators' perspective, led to increased attrition. Similarly, in a study on teachers serving students with emotional-behavioral disorders (EBD), Adera and Bullock (2010) found that the biggest stressors for teachers were "role overload" (p. 9) and too many responsibilities not related to instruction. Another surprising stress factor in the current study that I did not see evident in the literature was the physical demands required by the case teachers based on student populations, behaviors, lack of time to sit or rest, having to lift or position students, and simple physical exhaustion from the intensity of the work day.

Question 2: Factors of employment important to special education teachers at all levels of experience. The themes discussed above in previous literature were also evident in the views of the 16 teachers at all levels in the PK and K-3 special education departments. The aforementioned research on intrinsic motivation (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014) may have a somewhat bigger effect with this group. Eleven of the 16 participant teachers had worked in the district less than five years, so the motivation that brought them into the field may still be strong. The 16 participant teachers in my study also reflected themes similar to the research on workplace stress mentioned above (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Brunsting et al., 2014; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), but it may be that the stress level was more bearable, judging by the fact that nine of the 16 planned to stay in the district until retirement. The similarity of the responses of the teachers newer to the district and those with more years of district experience may be partly due to the fact that the teachers who have worked for the district just one or two years have all had previous special education teaching experience elsewhere, and may well have the same total number of years of experience as the teachers who have been in the district longer. So, although they may be learning a new system and educational culture, they are not actually "new" special education teachers; they know their jobs well.

Question 3: Principals' perceptions about which factors affect special education teacher retention and how their views coincide with the teachers' perspectives. In my study, the principals and teachers talked about many of the same themes, and the principals' perceptions about which factors are most important to teachers frequently coincided with the teachers' own views. Principals perceived that their support of special education students also helped support teachers, and again, the teachers agreed. Even on the Special Education Teacher Questionnaire, the full group of 16 participants considered principal support a high factor leading toward

retention. However, occasionally the teachers' views on retention and attrition did not coincide with the principals' views. For example, no principal named courtesy tuition as a potential retention factor, even though they had the same advantage. Like teachers, principals considered the emotional and personal support from administrators as one of the most significant retention factors. In the small schools, according to the current study, principals' perceptions of reasons for attrition are similar to the teachers' views. Both agreed that paperwork, too many meetings, scheduling, and parent issues could cause teachers to want to leave. Principals also suggested that teachers may leave because they are frustrated with seeing little or slow growth, or an academic decline in their students, or because the students assigned are very needy. Participant teachers did not mention these types of student issues as reasons for attrition, except in the case of severe behavior problems. Looking at previous research, many studies concluded that lack of administrative support was an important factor in special education teacher attrition. For example, in one study, Sedivy-Benton and Boden McGill (2012) found that teachers tend to stay if they perceive that they have influence on the school, support from the administrator, and control over some factors of their work. In another study, special educators were surveyed about their perceptions of administrative support (Otto & Arnold, 2005), and the researchers found that experienced special education teachers generally perceived their principals as supportive, while less experienced teachers perceived little support, unlike the current study, where almost all teachers felt positive support from school principals. None of the studies focused on small schools, so it is interesting to note that my findings on small schools were somewhat at odds with the findings of previous research.

Implications

The current study offers evidence supporting the following six recommendations for school districts, principals, and special education teachers in small schools. My hope is that this study can lead to improving the retention rates in the small school setting, and to influence policy to help all schools retain good special education teachers. Only through consistent instruction from good teachers can students with special needs achieve at their highest level.

1. Small schools may already have advantages that help attract and retain teachers, which they should be aware of and maintain. For example, district administrators should try to retain the small school atmosphere and culture as much as possible. The participants in the current study valued the camaraderie, mutual support, and frequent contact with the principal. Administrators should maintain or consider human resource benefits that may be valuable to special education teachers, whether it be courtesy tuition, as in the current study, stipends for extra time, or increased salary for special education teachers. District administration should also, when possible, hire special education teachers with professional education and years of experience.

2. If small schools grow, as was happening in the district at the time of the study, administrators should systematically plan to protect special education teachers and students, especially in terms of caseload size and space. If the district must reorganize as a result of growth, administrators should seriously consider an increase in district support, such as Lead Teachers without a caseload who are trained special educators and can travel from school to school to support special education teachers in all areas – paperwork, student issues, behavioral issues, scheduling, data collection methods, lesson planning, teaching methods, functional behavior assessments, etcetera. Both the teachers and the leaders in special education in the small schools felt that it was important to have people who have time to really focus on supporting teachers. That would

not only give teachers a chance to gain valuable information and insight, but would also relieve principals from some of the intense support of special educators they are responsible for in small schools like those in the current study.

3. Principals should support special education teachers and students, especially in instances where there are potentially serious parental or legal issues. This type of support was greatly appreciated by the participants in the current study. Principals should also work with teachers to maintain equitable caseload sizes and schedules by planning ahead in the spring for the following year, and by considering the skills, expertise, and physical capacity of the teachers in their building when assigning students to caseloads. Creative scheduling could help decrease stress and reduce the workload for teachers. From my emic perspective, for example, case managers do not always have to provide every service for every student on their caseload. In small schools with complicated schedules, any certified special educator can provide a co-teaching or resource room service for individual students, even if the students are on another teacher's caseload. That way, the team may be able to share the workload more equitably. This type of creative scheduling may result in teachers having more in-school time for paperwork, collaboration, and lesson planning.

4. To assist principals with this support, and in lieu of hiring district-level Lead Teachers, administrators might consider creating professional learning opportunities for principals to increase their knowledge about special education instruction, methods, behavior intervention plans, and both co-teaching and self-contained teaching environments. Additionally, as evident in the Special Education Teacher Questionnaire, principals could learn more about how they could alleviate the factors most influencing attrition of special education teachers - manageability of workload, role conflict, and stress.

5. There are several areas where district administrators, school principals, and the teachers themselves should work together to make changes that encourage retention. They should work together to find or create more professional learning activities targeted for the specific needs of special educators, but reduce the number of PL activities the teachers must attend that do not focus on "Learning strategies and good instruction for special education, [which] looks very different than good instruction for general education students" (Naomi Interview, 11/17/2016). District and school administrators should work with teachers to maintain intrinsic motivation and autonomy by providing opportunities for teachers to share their skills, observe each other, and take on leadership roles. They should create protocols to increase communication between district administrators, school principals, and the special education teams to avoid role conflict, so teachers have clear directives and do not feel conflicted about their duties. Administrators should also work to create more outlets for growth and advancement, such as the school-level IEP Lead Teacher positions (already in place in the district at the time of the study), as well as opportunities to participate in district- or school-wide committees, or by creating the aforementioned district-level Lead Teacher of Special Education (LTSE) positions.

6. Special education teachers in small schools could benefit from time each semester or quarter to meet together (with or without knowledgeable special education administrators or university collaborators) to help each other with concerns, exchange strategies, and share their expertise as a professional learning community. Experienced teachers who are anxious for more involvement should speak to principals about how they could have more of a voice in their school or district, or make a proposal to offer training to school staff to increase knowledge about specific disabilities, co-teaching models, data collection, creating and using visuals in the classroom, or generally how special education services should be delivered and how every staff

member in the school can be involved. If new teachers are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, colleagues or principals should help them figure out what their needs are and make a plan to fulfill them, or arrange a mentoring relationship with a more experienced teacher.

Limitations

The small sample size represented a limitation of this study, but the depth of data and deep understanding of the context was advantageous, as is often the case in this type of case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The use of only descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the questionnaire is another limitation due to the small sample size, and affects the significance of the quantitative data. The fact that I was a special education teacher in one of the small schools was a potential source of bias; however, my emic perspective could also be considered an affordance, in that my knowledge of the context was a rich resource for understanding the data, and helped me construct the understandings with the participants. The findings of my study are focused on the specific schools within one district, and should not be taken as evidence that all small schools would benefit from these specific conclusions.

Suggestions for Further Research

This multiple-case study of three experienced special education teachers working in small schools is important because it reveals what is different about the small school environment and what aspects of the work might help encourage retention for those teachers. Since small schools have received little attention in the special education teacher retention literature, this area warrants further study. As I worked on the data analysis and results, I found myself asking several critical questions. First, what might we discover about small primary school special educators through a large survey of teachers working in hundreds of small schools? Would the results be similar to this case study? Do location, student and teacher demographics, school culture, or cur-

riculum make a difference? How so? Second, I wondered what might a similar study reveal if the focus were on teachers new to the profession? Third, what might a similar study reveal if the focus were on teachers who recently transferred to another teaching environment (administration, general education, or a larger school)? Fourth, what would one discover through an action research study based on providing more targeted PL for special education teachers in small schools? What effect would the PL have on the teachers' level of satisfaction?

Concluding Statement

The problem of special education teacher attrition has not decreased. Staff morale, school budgets, and most importantly, the students with special needs are at risk emotionally and academically due to high special education teacher turnover. The lack of research on special education in small schools is not to be taken lightly. Small schools are not found only in rural communities, and are not a thing of the past. In the state where the study district is located, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), 7.5% of the schools were considered small, with an additional 5.1% considered midsize. In addition, there has been "a growing trend toward creating small schools" ("How Important is School Size?" 2016*).* The perspective of the experienced special educators, principals, and district administrators give in-depth insight to understanding the small school special education departments in our country to stop the drove of teachers leaving our children with special needs without the expertise and guidance they depend on.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Special Education Teacher Support Questionnaire
Morvant et al. (1995) with modifications by Olson (2016)

(Online Google Questionnaire; original formatting not available)

How long do you plan to remain in Special Education in [this district]?

- o I am over 55 or older and plan to stay until retirement
- o I am under 55 and plan to stay until retirement
- o A long time
- o A few more years
- o I plan to leave as soon as possible
- o Unsure

Experience

How many years have you been a teacher (in all)?

- o 1-4 years
- o 5 -9 years
- o 10-15 years
- o More than 15 years

How many years have you been a special education teacher?

- o 1-4 years
- o 5-9 years

- 10-15 years
- More than 15 years

How many years have you taught in Special Education in [this district] (any level)?

- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-15 years
- More than 15 years

How many years have you taught in Special Education in [this district] in the PK-3 level?

- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-15 years
- More than 15 years

I. Relationship with Building Principal

The following questions contain statements with which some people agree and others disagree. Please rate how much you personally agree or disagree with these statements. For each statement, click on the circle corresponding to your response. Use the following scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

My principal backs me up when I need it.

My principal works with me to solve problems.

My principal actively assists my efforts to integrate students.

I can count on my principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it.

I feel included in what goes on in this school.

The feedback I receive from my principal is helpful.

My building principal understands what I do.

I am satisfied with the quality of the support and encouragement I receive from my principal.

The principal recognizes the good work I do.

The principal encourages me to try out new ideas.

I receive feedback from my principal often.

II. Central Office Relationships

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

The central office special education department supports me in my interactions with parents.

A contact person from special education works with me to solve problems.

The district special education department backs me up when I need it.

The feedback from the district special education administrator is helpful.

The district special education administrator understands what I do in my job.

Support from the district special education administrator helps reduce the stress of my job.

I receive feedback from the district special education administrator as often as I need it.

III. Relationship with Other Teachers at Your School

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

Most of the other teachers in this school know what I do.

Teachers at this school come to me for help or advice.

Teachers at this school provide me with feedback about how I am doing.

I am satisfied with the school staff's attitude toward special education.

I share materials with teachers who are not in special education

General education teachers share materials with me.

Other teachers recognize the quality of my work.

IV. Preparation for Current Assignment

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding instructional techniques.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding working with parents.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding collaborating and/or consulting with classroom teachers.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding collaborating with others (e.g., psychologists, occupational/physical/speech therapists, social workers, etc.)

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding responding to the SEVERITY of my students' learning needs.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding responding to the DIVERSITY of my students' learning needs.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding curriculum modification or development.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding behavior management.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding training and supervision of instructional aides.

I feel well prepared for my current job regarding case management activities and corresponding paperwork.

I have enough training/experience to deal with students' learning problems.

I feel confident in my teaching.

V. Stress Related to Job Design

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I almost never feel stress related to my job.

I almost never feel stress related to the severity of my students' needs.

I almost never feel stress related to the large range of needs and abilities of my students.

I almost never feel stress related to student behavior and discipline problems.

I almost never feel stress related to bureaucratic requirements, rules, regulations, or paperwork.

I almost never feel stress related to having time to fulfill all my obligations at work.

I almost never feel stress related to conflicting goals, expectations, or directives.

My workload is manageable.

VI. Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

The total number of students I work with each week does not affect my workload.

The size of the group of students I work with during a given block of time does not affect my workload.

The number of things I am expected to do as part of my job does not affect my workload.

The severity of my students' needs does not affect my workload.

The diversity of my students' needs does not affect my workload.

VII. Affective Issues Related to Students

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I really enjoy my students.

I feel that I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students.

I find that my relationships with students have gotten better over my years of teaching.

Special education teachers have a powerful influence on students' achievement.

I have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching.

I feel a sense of accomplishment in my work with students.

My students often show that they appreciate me.

VIII. Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards

Use the following scale:

1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I am satisfied with my choice of profession.

I am satisfied with my current teaching assignment.

If I could go back and do it over again, it is very likely that I would become a special education teacher.

Despite some disappointments, special education teaching is worth it.

One of the things I like about this job is that I am always learning something new.

There are many rewards for being a special educator.

IX. Role Conflict

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I never experience conflict regarding time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers.

I never experience conflict regarding the expectations of the district special education department and the principal's expectations.

I never experience conflict regarding teaching to the standards and meeting students' needs.

I never experience conflict regarding the way lessons are taught in the general education classroom and what is effective with my students.

I never experience conflict regarding attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/ behavioral needs.

X. Parent Support

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I am satisfied with parent support at my school.

The parents of my students understand what I do.

My students' parents support what I am doing.

XI. Opportunities for Growth and Advancement

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I am satisfied with opportunities for professional learning and growth.

I am satisfied with opportunities for professional advancement and promotion.

In this district I have many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies.

XII. Autonomy

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

I have control over aspects of my job that I consider most important to getting it done well.

I am allowed to use curricula that best meet the needs of my students.

I have freedom within limits; I know what is expected of me but I can also be creative.

XIII. Adequacy of Materials

Use the following scale:
1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

The instructional space provided for me is more than adequate.

The instructional materials provided for me are more than adequate.

I almost never experience stress related to inadequate resources (materials, aide time, equipment, space).

Appendix B

Post-meeting Response Forms
(Anonymously completed)

Date of Meeting: _____

1) How many years have you worked in the district's PK-3 schools? Choose one: <5 or ≥ 5 years

2) How did you feel about the meeting? It was (circle all that apply):

- o fun
- o helpful
- o important
- o boring
- o waste of time
- o other _____

3) What was discussed in today's meeting?

4) How will that impact your work?

Appendix C

Participants' Responses on Post-meeting Response Form to Question 4
"How will [today's meeting] impact your work?"

Responses from teachers with less than five years of experience
September Meeting • "We will not be afraid of the Red Bar" (quotation marks from respondent) • Streamline progress reporting • Help me finish IEP's! • Increase efficiency • Expand my resource list • It provides support and knowledge • Helpful in locating information on Drive • Helpful with progress reports • The info about GoIEP should help! • It gives me resources to use when needed • It gives me ideas to present to my school about progress reporting • Learned of helpful tools on SpEd drive • Got help with progress report questions October Meeting • I will assign Co-Writer to a student • I am in the process of referring a student for AT, so it was extremely helpful November Meeting • Directly • Clarified some question I had about both • It will help me send my children to a new school more prepared • Look at hours more closely • Help me write my IEPs more effectively and efficiently • Writing IEPs more accurately and effectively

Responses from teachers with five or more years of experience:
September Meeting • I will do my best to use these practices • All of this greatly impact our work in the SpEd dept. • Vital info. October Meeting • This will highly impact my work with 2nd and 3rd graders • Help me be more efficient with tools • Polish my inclusion of AT in IEP November Meeting • Specific info for IEPs • Transition info will be a huge help with sending 3rd graders on • My IEPs will be more accurate.

Appendix D

Initial Draft of Teacher Interview Protocol

After reiterating participant rights and reconfirming assent to record, I would ask open-ended question such as these below. To establish rapport, encourage dialogue to support my constructionist framework, and follow up on tangents that may pertain to the theme, I would not necessarily ask every question or keep them in this order.

1. How did you happen to get in to special education?
2. How does this district compare to other schools you have worked in?
3. Why do you think some special education teachers leave the district?
4. Why do you stay?
5. Describe how your principal supports your work here.
6. Describe your relationship with other teachers in the school.
7. Describe your relationship to parents of the children you work with.
8. Describe a typical day
9. Questionnaire responses in the category about __ ranged from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' in almost equal numbers. Describe your perspective __.
10. Talk about how the central office administrators affect your work and your decision to stay.
11. Describe the physical conditions of your work, regarding materials and space.
12. What kinds of things make your work stressful, or create stress for your colleagues?
13. Tell me about the students on your caseload.
14. Talk about your dreams for the future.

Appendix E

Revised Teacher Interview Protocol Using Data from Questionnaire

After reiterating participant rights and reconfirming assent to record, I asked the following open-ended questions. Depending on interviewee responses, I did not necessarily ask every question or keep them in this order to reduce redundancy, allow for tangents related to the theme, and to support my constructionist framework.

1. How did you happen to get in to special education?
2. How does this district compare to other schools you have worked in?
3. Why do you think some special education teachers leave the district?
4. Why do you stay?
5. Describe how your principal supports your work here.
6. Describe your relationship with other teachers in the school.
7. Describe your relationship to parents of the children you work with.
8. Describe a typical day.
9. Describe the physical conditions of your work (materials, space, physical expectations).
10. Tell me about the students on your caseload.
11. Questionnaire responses about the support from the district administrator were varied.

    How do the following affect you in your job?

    - Frequency of feedback from the district special education administrator
    - How helpful the feedback from the DA is
    - The DA's ability to reduce the stress of your job

12. Most respondents to the questionnaire feel stress related to their job, due to the severity of their students' needs, the range of needs and abilities, behavior and discipline problems,

bureaucratic requirements and paperwork, lack of time, conflicting goals or directives. Talk about stress as it relates to your specific job and duties.

13. There were a variety of answers about the manageability of the workload as a special educator in the district. How do you feel about the workload? What affects it most? (Size of caseload? Size of groups? Things you are expected to do? Severity of students' disabilities?)
14. The questions about role conflict also had responses spread out from high to low. Talk about your experiences with role conflict regarding:
    3. time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers,
    4. the expectations of the district special education department and the principal's expectations,
    5. teaching to the standards and meeting students' needs,
    6. the way lessons are taught in the general education classroom and what is effective with your students, and
    7. attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/behavioral needs,
15. Are you satisfied with the opportunities for growth and advancement? Talk about your dreams for the future.
16. Anything else you would like to say about your work?

Appendix F

Mean and Standard Deviation of Likert Scores on Questionnaire

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
I. Relationship with Building Principal	4.30	
My principal backs me up when I need it.	4.50	0.52
My principal works with me to solve problems.	4.50	0.67
My principal actively assists my efforts to integrate students.	4.58	0.51
I can count on my principal to provide appropriate assistance when a student's behavior requires it.	3.92	0.67
I feel included in what goes on in this school.	4.33	0.65
The feedback I receive from my principal is helpful.	4.42	0.51
My building principal understands what I do.	4.00	0.85
I am satisfied with the quality of the support and encouragement I receive from my principal.	4.33	0.49
The principal recognizes the good work I do.	4.50	0.52
The principal encourages me to try out new ideas.	4.33	0.78
I receive feedback from my principal often.	3.58	0.79

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
II. Central Office Relationships	3.44	
The central office special education department supports me in my interactions with parents.	3.67	0.78
A contact person from special education works with me to solve problems.	3.67	0.89
The district special education department backs me up when I need it.	3.67	0.79
The feedback from the district special education administrator is helpful.	3.42	1.00
The district special education administrator understands what I do in my job.	3.67	0.78
Support from the district special education administrator helps reduce the stress of my job.	3.08	0.90
I receive feedback from the district special education administrator as often as I need it.	3.00	1.21

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
III. Relationships with Other Teachers at Your School	3.94	
Most of the other teachers in this school know what I do.	3.83	0.72
Teachers at this school come to me for help or advice.	4.25	0.75
Teachers at this school provide me with feedback about how	3.33	0.78

I am doing.		
I am satisfied with the school staff's attitude toward special education.	3.83	0.83
I share materials with teachers who are not in special education.	4.25	0.97
General education teachers share materials with me.	4.17	0.72
Other teachers recognize the quality of my work.	4.17	0.83

Category	**Mean Likert Score (1-5)**	**Standard Deviation**
IV. Preparation for Current Assignment	4.17	
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding instructional techniques.	4.50	0.52
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding working with parents.	4.50	0.52
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding collaborating and/or consulting with classroom teachers.	4.25	0.62
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding collaborating with others (e.g., psychologists, occupational/physical/speech therapists, social workers, etc.)	4.42	0.67
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding responding to the SEVERITY of my students' learning needs.	4.00	0.85
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding responding to the DIVERSITY of my students' learning needs.	4.33	0.65
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding curriculum modification or development.	4.17	0.58
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding behavior management.	3.75	0.75
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding training and supervision of instructional aides.	3.75	0.87
I feel well prepared for my current job regarding case management activities and corresponding paperwork.	4.50	0.52
I have enough training/experience to deal with students' learning problems.	4.25	0.75
I feel confident in my teaching.	4.33	0.65

Category	**Mean Likert Score (1-5)**	**Standard Deviation**
V. Stress Related to Job Design	2.31	
I almost never feel stress related to my job.	1.92	0.79
I almost never feel stress related to the severity of my students' needs.	2.08	1.00
I almost never feel stress related to the large range of needs and abilities of my students.	2.33	0.98
I almost never feel stress related to student behavior and discipline problems.	1.73	0.79

I almost never feel stress related to bureaucratic requirements, rules, regulations, or paperwork.	2.08	1.08
I almost never feel stress related to having time to fulfill all my obligations at work.	2.08	1.00
I almost never feel stress related to conflicting goals, expectations, or directives.	2.58	1.31
My workload is manageable.	3.17	0.94

Category	**Mean Likert Score (1-5)**	**Standard Deviation**
VI. Factors Contributing to Manageability of Workload	2.76	
The total number of students I work with each week does not affect my workload.	3.08	1.16
The size of the group of students I work with during a given block of time does not affect my workload.	3.25	1.22
The number of things I am expected to do as part of my job does not affect my workload.	2.17	1.11
The severity of my students' needs does not affect my workload.	2.67	1.07
The diversity of my students' needs does not affect my workload.	2.50	1.09

Category	**Mean Likert Score (1-5)**	**Standard Deviation**
VII. Affective Issues Related to Students	4.48	
I really enjoy my students.	4.75	0.45
I feel that I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students.	4.58	0.67
I find that my relationships with students have gotten better over my years of teaching.	4.75	0.62
Special education teachers have a powerful influence on students' achievement.	4.83	0.39
I have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching.	4.33	0.98
I feel a sense of accomplishment in my work with students.	4.58	0.51
My students often show that they appreciate me.	4.17	0.58

Category	**Mean Likert Score (1-5)**	**Standard Deviation**
VIII. Satisfaction and Personal Assessment of Rewards	4.48	
I am satisfied with my choice of profession.	4.42	0.51
I am satisfied with my current teaching assignment.	4.67	0.49
If I could go back and do it over again, it is very likely that I would become a special education teacher.	4.17	0.83
Despite some disappointments, special education teaching is worth it.	4.33	0.89

One of the things I like about this job is that I am always learning something new.	4.50	0.90
There are many rewards for being a special educator.	4.25	0.87

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
IX. Role Conflict	2.66	
I never experience conflict regarding time spent working directly with students vs. with their classroom teachers.	3.33	1.37
I never experience conflict regarding the expectations of the district special education department and the principal's expectations.	3.25	1.14
I never experience conflict regarding teaching to the standards and meeting students' needs.	2.17	1.19
I never experience conflict regarding the way lessons are taught in the general education classroom and what is effective with my students.	1.73	0.65
I never experience conflict regarding attending to students' academic needs vs. their social/behavioral needs.	1.92	1.00

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
X. Parent Support	4.04	
I am satisfied with parent support at my school.	4.50	0.67
The parents of my students understand what I do.	3.50	1.09
My students' parents support what I am doing.	4.33	0.65

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
XI. Opportunities for Growth and Advancement	3.21	
I am satisfied with opportunities for professional learning and growth.	3.58	1.24
I am satisfied with opportunities for professional advancement and promotion.	3.00	1.35
In this district I have many opportunities to learn new techniques and strategies.	3.33	1.15

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
XII. Autonomy	4.04	
I have control over aspects of my job that I consider most important to getting it done well.	3.67	0.98
I am allowed to use curricula that best meet the needs of my students.	3.75	0.75
I have freedom within limits; I know what is expected of me but I can also be creative.	4.33	0.49

Category	Mean Likert Score (1-5)	Standard Deviation
XIII. Adequacy of Materials and Space	3.75	
The instructional space provided for me is more than adequate.	3.17	1.34
The instructional materials provided for me are more than adequate.	4.08	1.00
I almost never experience stress related to inadequate resources (materials, aide time, equipment, space).	3.33	1.07

Appendix G

Administrator Interview Protocol

After reiterating participant rights and reconfirming consent to record, I would ask the following questions:

1. What is your role in respect to special education teachers in your building (principals) or district (district special education administrator)?
2. Can you describe the ways you provide support for the special education teachers in your school (in this district)?
3. About how much time do you spend communicating with or providing support to special education teachers each week?
4. What do you think special education teachers consider the best things about being a special educator in this school?
5. What things do you think they might find difficult?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add in regard to special education teachers in this school/district?
7. Besides your support, can you think of other ways the district could increase retention of special education teachers?